WHEN THE TIDE TURNS

FILSON YOUNG

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BY

FILSON YOUNG

Author of "The Sands of Pleasure," "The Happy Motorist," "Venus and Cupid, an Impression," "Ireland at the Crossroads," "Christopher Columbus," etc.

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TO
MY FRIEND
Eric R. D. Maclagan

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BOOK I

WHEN THE TIDE TURNS

I

RUPERT SAVAGE pressed the tiller against his side and slacked away the sheet of the lug-sail, and the little boat paid off before the wind, the water bubbling and talking under her planks. As the white sail bellied out and strained against the mast he steered close in to the low shores, flying past miniature rocky capes and bays on the clear green water. Presently, as a small natural harbour opened out in the rocks, he slipped the halliards and lowered the sail, swinging the boat round and pointing her up the narrow passage. The water lay perfectly still in the morning heat; even the sea birds were silent; and the empty shore gave back no sound but an echo of the murmur of the tide where it slipped through the narrows. Before him, at the head of the inlet, appeared a patch of shingly beach; the little boat's way carried her on and up until the deep silence was broken by the crunch and slow grating touch of her landfall, and by the little wave of water that, following, broke on the pebbles. And then everything was still again.

Rupert sat for a moment, attentive to the charmed silence; then he jumped out, taking the boat's painter

up to a projecting rock and making it fast, and carried his basket up the little beach on to the slope of sea-grass that stretched above it. Choosing a soft, sun-warmed spot, he took off his grey flannel coat and waistcoat, kicked off his white canvas shoes, unfastened his tie and folded it into a pocket of his coat. Then his head disappeared behind his soft shirt, reappeared again with a tumbled crown of ruddy brown hair; his socks and trousers were slipped off and laid beside the coat, and he appeared as a long, slim, rather loosely built youth of about twenty-one, with merry grey eyes and a sad mouth, and a broad forehead over which his tumbled hair fell rather low. He stepped, sidling and balancing himself over the stones, to a steeper edge of the rock, and, hesitating a moment, plunged into the water.

He swam and splashed in that clear element for half-an-hour, unwilling to leave it for the hot earth; then he climbed ashore, dried himself in the sun, dressed, and with his basket in his hand, went along the grass for a few hundred yards until he came to a rib of sandy beach that divided a bluff mass of rock from the mainland. He crossed the damp sandy channel, from which the waters had only just ebbed, and climbed and scrambled up the grassy shoreward side of the rock.

Gunn's Island stands like a fortress at the entrance to the lough. Northward it fronts the narrows with sheer cliffs as high as a cathedral, and eastward looks out on the tumbling waste of the Irish Sea. It stands higher than the mainland, from which it

is only separated at high water of spring tides, and its attraction for Rupert was that it afforded the best view of the narrow channel where the tides streamed past the low green shores day and night with a noise like the roar of a great city. From it also he could best observe the evolutions of a curious overfall or eddy, known as the "Priest's Mother," that swings up and down with the tides there off Gunn's Island. Although the inhabitants of those shores believe that it is caused by the restless spirit of an old woman, the mother of a priest, whose coffin fell overboard and sank while it was being taken from Rathshene to Killeef for burial, it is more probable that some shelf or cavity in the bottom combines with the great weight and quickness of the current to produce the overfall — an eddy harmless enough at certain periods and conditions of the tide, but at others treacherous to boats that come within its influence. From Gunn's Island it is, at any rate, an arresting feature in the view of the narrows, for on the calm face of the sliding bulk of waters it appears as a mysterious and shifting embellishment; now spreading itself in outlined circles as smooth as oil, now swinging and slanting in a dizzy revolving hollow, now disappearing for a minute at a time, and appearing in a sullen burst of foam a cable's length away.

In the slack half-hour at the bottom of the ebb the Priest's Mother sleeps and makes no sign. Upon the first inward draught of the stream she awakes with a sob that on a still day can be heard in the

pastures two miles away. At half flood, for some unknown reason, she sinks into quietness, and can only be traced by a network of fine lines on the surface; and at the top of high water, when the tide seems dead and the surface currents at rest, her clamour again breaks out on the brimming stillness, and continues until at low water the cattle are trailing home from Gunn's Island to the mainland. It was not wonderful that for an imaginative shore-dwelling race this creature of the tides should be invested with a personality, or that their ears should discern in its changeful but eternal rumour a busy and intimate intelligence.

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Rupert continued to climb until he reached the level grass of the summit, which he crossed to the point where it ends and the rocky wall of the island begins to go down to the sea. Clambering skilfully over the edge he let himself down from ledge to ledge until he came to a natural seat formed by a projection of the rock; and there he unpacked his basket and ate his lunch. When he had finished he lit a pipe, and took out a sketch-book and a box of pencils and pens and a small ink bottle. He opened the sketch-book and looked closely at one or two pages — closely, and a little hopelessly; for his eyes constantly travelled from them to the water, and back again, while his brows were knitted in an anxious puzzled expression. Presently he laid the book aside with a sigh, and, leaning back, looked out over the water.

His view was across the narrows — the neck of the bottle formed by the great lough. Before him lay the low shore on the other side, running out into a long point dividing sea from lough, and on his left the waters broadened away towards the line of mountains that are their inland boundary. A very peaceful scene on this quiet day, with no movement but the fleeting current, and little sound but the continuous murmur and growl of the tide among the rocks.

Its soft and prolonged thunder filled the quiet air. Green fields lay beyond the flood, with their sheep dreaming in the sunshine; nearer, the level blue floor came sliding and sliding in from the sea. That was after Rupert had been looking at the fields and the sheep; but when his eyes had rested for long on the water and returned again to land, it was the tide that seemed fixed and steady, and the shore with its white cabins that took up the movement and, like a panorama, streamed seaward towards the bar. It was a day without wind, but sometimes a wandering air would come down and sweep across the calm water, wrinkling it with tiny wrinkles that turned its radiant colour to a deeper hue. Patches as of purple and peacock thus came and faded upon the broad ultramarine, and kept the surface colours fading and changing like lights in a lover's eyes. Inshore the water was green, or, where the rocks and seaweed showed through the shallows, a golden brown; and wherever in deep water a rock or jutting point of land opposed itself to that swift tide, it was girdled with a ring of foam and murmuring sound.

On Rupert's left, in the sweep of Bandarragh Bay where the shore curved in from the bend formed by Gunn's Island, the waters were sown with a great brown tumble of rocks, and the coast continued in capes and bays and low promontories and forked inlets and little islands and sounds, shoals and deeps and roadsteads, like the coast line of a continent in miniature. Along this coast line the rocks were clothed with a soft garment of brown seaweed, still wet where flat expanses had held the water from the last tide, salt and rich and moist and odorous. And everywhere on these flat expanses of rock and seaweed gulls and puffins were perching and crying, now dipping into a pool, now quarrelling and screaming, now dressing their faultless plumage, but always decorating the water with the flashing of their wings and their circling movements.

And to all this coast world the returning tide was like the return of life and breath. Its tremendous volume, floating in without wave or ripple, spent and spread itself upon the shores, a beneficent and life-giving stream. Boundless and inexhaustible the source from which it came, into which it would obediently return, boundless the life and power of its superb movement! Like the blowing of a great wind, it poured in and in, as if it could never pause or turn, seeming to contain in its steady flood all colour, all life, and all movement. As yet its great daily task was but half accomplished; its level where it brimmed against the weedy rocks was still far below the brown ring that marked its limit of ascen-

sion; but though so much was still to do its movement was perfectly steady and sure, as if all eternity instead of only a few hours remained for the task.

In the smoothest part of the current, as though it had been wiped and prepared like a slate, the runes and riddles of the Meadows, as they named what in calm weather was little more than a mysterious inscription on the face of the tide, were being traced by an invisible finger, and fading as fast as they appeared; and off the point of Gunn's Island two great circles of commotion girdled with snow marked where the Priest's Mother, like an alert sentry, kept watch on the entrance to the lough.

It was these lines and circles on the water that fascinated Rupert and brought him to Gunn's Island so often in pursuit of his curious art. He had evolved for himself a medium of expression, at which he laboured constantly, feeling his way with little more help than was to be found in the dozen French illustrated papers and English art journals that he devoured every week. Colour had little or no attraction for him; he saw everything in outline; he ignored the ordinary terms of light and shade; he never distinguished between things and their shadows, although he had subtle tricks of line that suggested the direction of light. To sit for hours looking at a landscape rich in colour, in mass, in lights and shadows, and to bring home a sheet of white paper with a dozen long waving lines on it, and as many little whorls and curves of dots, seemed to his aunts and a few friends who ever saw his work a lamen-

table misdirection of energy. Moreover, they complained that what Rupert drew was not like anything real, and of course they were right. The strange women in full-length profile that sometimes, apparently quite irrelevantly, adorned the left hand foreground of, say, a dozen lines that were the mountains beyond the lough, bore no resemblance to the well-nourished young women of the neighbourhood; and it is at least doubtful whether Rupert intended that they should. His art was for him an escape from a reality that, although it was far from repelling, did not satisfy him. He seldom tried to draw objects or views; it was conditions, powers, influences, elements that he groped after, always with the result of disillusion and unhappiness. Once when he was twelve years old he had been missed for a whole autumn day of storm, and had been discovered sitting on a hillside with a damp sketch-book covered with weird lines, and confessedly trying to draw the wind. His Aunt Leonora had spoken very seriously to him about it.

"Apart from such a thing being nonsense," she had said, holding the wet paper between a dainty finger and thumb, "there's something that isn't right about it. God made the wind invisible for some good purpose that we don't understand, and to try to make a picture of it would be almost wickedness, if it wasn't just thoughtlessness. Why, Rupert," she had added, laughing, "it's the kind of thing a mad person would do! Give me a kiss, and

go and see if Jane has finished making that toffee we spoke about!"

So he had given up trying to draw the wind, but he often tried to draw the movement of water, as he saw it in the endless lines and circles of the eddies. The sketch which lay before him, and at which he looked with dissatisfaction, consisted of little more than a single line enclosing the moving water, with a few other lines and minute mosaic of dots and patches, representing the shore above it. Into the lower left hand corner was crushed the figure of a seal; the rest of the paper was blank but for a delicate tracery of dotted lines in the centre of the current; it was the wonderful enclosing line that gave to the white paper an unerring suggestion of the brimming, moving current. The seal, with its stooping, liquid pose, and elaborately curved whiskers, was a mere symbol — of what Rupert himself could hardly have told. The coat was drawn like a damasked fabric, its face was sinister and leering, its eyes and brow were the eyes and brow of a woman, and in its expression and pose it was like a vicious and malevolent dandy. In all Rupert's drawings there was some such figure, looking on at the scene like an outsider — generally it was a bird, or a fish, or a woman, although sometimes he invented a beast for himself, with curving claws and a scaly back, and a woman's streaming hair that flowed away on the water. These figures often filled him with a vague terror; he deliberately deformed their features, giving them sinister slits for eyes, and

gaping mouths, swollen, munching cheeks, or protruding tongues; and he would put delicate, dancing hooved legs on to swollen bodies, half enamoured, half ashamed of his grotesques.

He was pleased enough with the seal, which was thus true to his imagination, and expressed something that he had no words or thoughts for; but when he looked from his sketch to the slackening stream of the tide, his heart sank. It was not what he wanted; it never was what he wanted, although often he came near enough to see in imagination the fluttering garments of the nymph he was pursuing just vanishing from sight. He laid aside his sketch-book, rested his chin on his hand, and listened.

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In the silence of his immediate environment the gentle multitudinous sounds of the tide crowded in upon him. Little murmurs and sighs, where the stream slid past a fringe of thirsty seaweed; profound hummings like the notes of an organ, where the advancing flood poured itself through some narrow opening into a deep basin; minute bubblings, where upon the very margin of some fragment of strand, sheltered by an outward barrier of rock, each succeeding froth of water laid itself on the pearly sand with the softness of a child's kiss; mutterings and gurglings, where the white foam crumbled on the circle of the Priest's Mother; mellow harmonies, deep firm chords, prolonged sobs and litanies, where the wild channel waters were checked on the bar — these all had their part, the tenor forces of the great

chorus that sounded upon that shore. From without, beyond the bar, where a line of darker blue showed the edge of the race that is for ever hurrying up or down past the entrance to the lough, came faintly the deep fundamental note or noise of the sea. Upon it all the melodies of tides and currents, eddies, whirls, and indraughts continually modulated and resolved like chromatic harmonies on a pedal point; above it the cries of sea birds and the faint noises of land life completed the symphony.

As the tide rose steadily, the volume of these sounds seemed to rise with it. Under its calm breast there was surely contained an immense excitement and emotion, a vast impulse that seemed to rush from the centre of the current outwards under the surface until it broke and escaped in foam and froth on the shore. Rupert felt this mysterious vitality strongly within himself; so much of his life and thought were centred in the sea, that his physical nature responded to it, and in a sense kept time with the tides. When the stream was flowing he was conscious of a more generous inspiration, an affluent and sanguine vitality that culminated at high water in an overflow of good spirits and infectious gaiety that made him at such times a delightful companion. But with the ebb there often seemed to come a corresponding effluence in the currents of his life, a sensation of emptiness and apathy, as though the world held no good thing; and this depression lasted until the coarse seaweeds revealed in the bottom of

the ebb were covered again and the water was returning to the half-tide rocks and pools.

And now as the waters poured into the lough, the puzzled, dissatisfied look left his face; he had become one with the spirit of the place and of those strange, fluent, secret companions that passed so often before his eyes on their journey in or out of the lough to the faery region of dawn or sunset that they doubtless inhabited. Their murmurs made music in his ears, so sweet that once or twice, at some delicate change in their rushing tune that only a sensitive ear could detect, a smile parted his lips for a moment, and a tremor of pleasure rippled through his body.

And still in volume and intensity the sounds of the tide increased; and its movement also began to increase, as though the joy of its influence had conquered even the large restraints which it obeyed. A sense of impatient exultation began to reveal itself on the face of the waters that were now sliding in through the narrows so fast that the further shore seemed to Rupert's eyes to be rushing out to sea. An almost lyrical movement of passionate joy hovered and flitted over the great moving azure surface. The Priest's Mother, true to her unalterable laws, ceased to foam and thunder at half-tide; but it seemed now as though some special reason had governed her quietude, and as though every force in the sea had concentrated itself on the one inward movement. Smooth as a table though the main body of water was, tiny corrugations, little chuckling wavelets,

frothings and breakings of miniature seas began to animate it like laughter. Small eddies appeared spinning, and travelled half a mile up the broad blue band before they disappeared again, spinning. The seaweeds fringing the steep rocks, now almost covered to high water mark, swung with a rhythmical movement, stretching themselves out, each branch and frond separate, towards the centre of the current; and where it flowed rapidly past some stone or deep-water rock it brushed the weeds almost rudely in its direction, while they leaned against the force of the stream, momentarily springing back a little, momentarily giving way.

The sea-gulls and guillemots and puffins grew more excited and cried more insistently, intoxicated by the flowing of the water and by the presence of the food it was carrying in. Sea anemones in the rock pools opened out like flowers as they felt the cool waters laving them again; limpets by thousands loosened their hold on the rocks, and renewed their life in the same beneficent influence; and from the centre of the flood itself a long faint furrow flowed out diagonally to each shore, and faded away, and appeared again, as the majestic fluent power persisted and increased. And hot and windless though the day was, great waves or airs of coolness at intervals swept over Gunn's Island, rhythmic like the tidal furrows in their regular coming, and, borne in like them with the tide, part of its sweetening and renewing force, obedient like it to the source and pulse of all life; and thus while the waters in the

lough were renewed, the mellow reviving airs swept over its shores, salt and strong, and fragrant of the far-away windy spaces of the ocean.

Higher and higher crept the line of waters against the rocks — so high that from Rupert's perch the whole land seemed to be foundering and settling down into the sea. Laughter of little waves and ripples, suckings and plungings under hollows in the rocks, manifested the coming of the supreme moment; but still the waters flowed on and in, and still, beyond the bar, lay quiet and undisturbed the eternal sea.

The spirit of its smile, mild, inscrutable, melancholy, is in that word. The boy sitting on the hoary rock round which this flood of newness and youth was pouring, who had forgotten his own affairs in the contemplation of its calm indifference, was yet at this moment the creature of its endless, effortless commands. Come! it calls, and races and dynasties rise from its savage and stormy nurseries. Come! and men go forth in navies to found empires and imperishable traditions. Come! and the solitary fisherman, fearing and hating it, goes daily forth to a battle against certain odds. Come! and women shudder and weep, and drown their hearts in its depths. Yet it moves not one hairsbreadth from its appointed course; and the bubble on the sand, the overfall on the rocky shelf, the race that keeps its sentry-go in the channel, are but partners in the vast minuet of the tides that advance and retreat, and pull and thrust, and pour in and pour out, and make way here, and hurry round there, and mingle and curtsey

and rise and fall in cycles of hours and years and centuries throughout the world.

The boy sitting on the rock, his ears filled with their mellow, heart-breaking music, thought suddenly the inevitable thought of youth — how long they were here before me, how long they will remain after me! The same rocks, the same tides, the same sounds, a thousand years ago, a thousand years hence — and I no more than a ripple that smiles for a moment on their surface! A sudden sense of smallness and loneliness oppressed him, and his clear face clouded with trouble; but the even diapason, sounding now kindly and reassuring, continued to fill his ears: a lark sang to him somewhere over the shore; and presently the gloom left his face, and he listened while the roar of the tide little by little began to fail and grow less. Its falling note charmed him into a profound abstraction.

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Gradually the murmurs of the tide sank and ceased; its song was ended; and all round the shores the waters stood brimming at the highest mark of spring tides. The solemn mystery was accomplished, or on the very verge of accomplishment; for though no movement was discernible in the great blue mirror into which the sky shone, the last ripples of its pulse were languidly passing over the surface and spending themselves imperceptibly on the shore. Even the sea birds had ceased their crying, as though they also were charmed into silence, and they clustered on the small uncovered surface of the rocks, or

wheeled silently in the air. The perches and beacons seemed to have sunk down to their chins in the brimming flood, as the land itself seemed to have shrunk in size when the tide had thrown its garment of silver and azure upon the shores. Under the rocks the seaweeds, no longer brushed aside by the current, leaned, golden and languorous, on the water, or swayed and trembled in the clear green depths as though intoxicated with the passion of the moment. Calmest of all, the pellucid depths where the whirlpool slept, and where it would appear with the first impulse of the ebb, rested and shone under Rupert's gaze, below his very feet. For a minute, perhaps, Nature seemed to hold her breath, abandoning herself to the sweet enervating dream of a repose she can never know. Up on the cliff the boy held his breath also, his lips slightly parted, his eyes gazing fascinated at the water.

Slowly, so slowly that the eye strained to follow it, the smooth oily floor beneath him seemed to tilt and to come towards him with a dizzy sinking movement. Two fields of water began, slowly, deliberately, to change their places, one coming towards him, one sliding away from him, each beginning to turn and revolve upon itself, and to circle after the other. Still not a ripple disturbed the surface; and the movements of the water were so slow that they fascinated his gaze, which was concentrated on that sinking displacement. As he looked on it, as the great fluid wheel began to spin and sink, the island on which he sat seemed also to turn and slowly to spin

upon itself, and to tilt its base upwards into the air. The opposite shore he felt rather than saw to be advancing on him, and the whole floor of the sea to be swimmingly tilted, and the very rock on which he sat to be floating unstably in space. The wheel of water turned a little faster, sinking still towards the middle, a great ring of wavelets breaking upon its edge. Presently a twirling hole appeared at the centre of depression. It began to circle faster, swinging and tilting this way and that. Every movement quickened; the shores were spinning, the sea was spinning, the great wheel was spinning; the perches and beacons began to circle round the horizon; the sky was spinning and falling, the world wheeling and heaving.

Rupert turned suddenly away, like one who breaks a spell violently; and gathering up his basket and books went across to the shoreward side of the island, out of sight of the sea. He made sure that his boat was riding safely in her creek, and then settled down to work. So long he sat there, silently absorbed, that to the gulls sailing high over his head he must have appeared like one of the rocks, part of the wide landscape that their round hungry eyes searched so carefully.

II

It was late in the afternoon when Rupert brought his boat to her moorings in the little sound that divided the Abbacy House from the shore. The island was just big enough to contain the house and gardens; the house had been built by a former Savage when the Abbacy or Manor Farm had come into the family, and was a rambling two-storied affair, looking out to the west over the blue waters of the lough and the dim hills beyond, and almost overshadowed by the belt of tall trees that grew on the edge of the shore and stretched their branches over the narrow sound. At low water a stone causeway gave access to the mainland and the shore road, but at high water the sea filled the winding sound and brimmed up to the edge of the lawn, which was shored up and timbered like a quay side, and had a little dock or tidal harbour in it, so that at high water the masts of Rupert's little fleet showed like golden shafts amid the cypresses and elms of the garden.

As he came up into the garden there was a great cawing and commotion among the rooks in the trees by the shore; and presently they rose with a whirring of wings and sailed away across the lough, and

the silence fell deep again. He went in at the open door, laid down his basket, and shouted —

"Aunties!"

There was a rustle of silk on the landing above, and a very trim and rather old-fashioned lady of sixty-five, who looked like fifty, came bustling down the stairs.

"Well, Rupert, you've got back!" She kissed him affectionately. "What a glorious day! I'm sure you're hungry — indeed, I would just think you were starved after such a long day on the water; but tea will be ready presently. Auntie Jane is in the drawing-room just finishing a letter. Are you sure your feet aren't wet? And Thomas Quinn was here this afternoon to say that Elliot's cart will be coming out to-morrow from Rathshene, and they'll bring the lead then. I'm afraid he has been drinking — he was looking not at all himself. I said to him, 'Thomas, isn't it a shame for you to be in this state, with such a good wife as you have, and every one willing to help you to keep steady?' And he just said, ''Deed, mem, and that's the truth; but the Prodestan' boys were out last night after the Papishers, and I doubt some of us finished up at Foley's!'"

"What a rascal!" said Rupert, smiling. "I'll give him a talking to when I see him. Just now I sympathize, because I'm so thirsty myself. I'm dying for tea."

"You shall have it in a minute, my poor boy," and the rustle of silk, accompanied by a jingle of

keys, disappeared under a dark doorway leading to the pantry, whence an odour of spices came out into the house.

It was always like this — no thought but for Rupert's comfort, Rupert's welfare, in the hearts of the two old aunts whom he loved and tyrannized over. They belonged to a social order fast disappearing even from Ireland, where the tides of change rise slowly, but none the less surely, loosening the old landmarks, gently washing away a world that is rooted in the soil, and crumbles and changes shape only with it. The two old ladies and Rupert represented the last of the Savages, once a great family owning vast tracts of land on those fertile shores, but now so dwindled that little except the name, the dignity, and whatever inheritance of quality and character is incorruptible in a family remained to grace the possession of a few hundred acres, and a street of houses in the adjoining little town of Rathshene. Rupert's mother had died when he was a baby; his father, a distant cousin of the same name, and an engaging ne'er-do-well, entirely affectionate and uneconomic, who had inherited a fair property in Donegal, had lost and wasted it all in disastrous attempts at horse-breeding, and had spent his latter days at the Abbacy, mismanaging the affairs of his sisters-in-law to their entire satisfaction. Fortunately for them and for himself, he died while he was still in the belief that he was of use to the world. He also was of Ireland; anywhere else such a character would have degenerated into complete ruin and

disrepute; only there, where people are so humanly tolerant, his dignity and charming nature resisted corruption, so that he was merely useless, and never base.

He had early initiated the boy into the mysteries of boats, guns, and horses; schooling him in seamanship, drilling him in the coverts with the twenty-bore gun that was his last gift, teaching him to look with knowledge on hocks and withers and pasterns, showing him the bays where salmon and mullet could be netted, navigating the swift tides and charmed sounds and channels of the great island-studded lough; and generally inculcating in him a fine perception of quality in all outdoor things that pertain to the enjoyment of man. Rupert soon caught his father's infectious intolerance of a badly-hung gate, an ill-tied knot, a wrongly-pruned tree, a wrinkled sail, and all ready-made, commercial articles whatsoever. Time and patient labour were the hall-marks of everything; and as there was an abundance of both at the Abbacy, buildings, boats, gardens, and farms, all displayed in a high degree that style or technical perfection which is the delight of the educated enthusiast. That everything in the end cost twice as much as was necessary, and that the estate did not pay, was the defect of Arthur Savage's qualities.

To Rupert he was a sunny compound of memories and the impersonation of the ideal in all outdoor affairs. To shoot like his father, to round up a boat to her moorings in a stiff breeze of wind with every

sail set, like his father; to "carry on" in a squall himself, and to regard it as rather ill-bred foolhardiness in anybody else, like his father — these were Rupert's earliest ambitions, and they remained with him throughout his life. He had been too young to recognize his father's defects while he was alive, and was too loyal — and in some ways too like him — to acknowledge them after he was dead; and this store of affection, with an income of about two hundred pounds a year, was Arthur Savage's legacy to his son. The boy had no guardian; things were allowed to take their course, and he went on living at the Abbacy with his aunts, the Miss Savages, as every one called them, coming home to them from his public school in England with affection for them and delight in his home unabated.

"What Rupert was to do" was a subject of grave periodic discussions in the Abbacy House; they had been going on ever since he was fourteen, and were likely to go on indefinitely. That young gentlemen of limited private means did, in these latter days, ultimately go out into the world was dimly recognized by the aunts, who fully intended that Rupert should be an ambassador at least before he died; but the time for taking the necessary steps was always in the future. They had arrived at the age when young people never seemed to them to grow up; their untroubled virginity had become a kind of element or atmosphere in which the people they loved breathed and lived; and Rupert, in spite of his twenty years and tall athletic frame, the down

on his lip, and the resonant voice of manhood, was still in their eyes a child who needed all the care that two expert nurses could give him. Formal and ceremonious concessions to his growth were indeed made: on his sixteenth birthday his Aunt Lavinia had resigned to him her place at the head of the table; on his seventeenth the servants had been solemnly instructed to call him "Misther Rupert" instead of "Masther Rupert" — an instruction which they often forgot; and on his eighteenth the keys of the wine-cellar and the duty of paying the outdoor wages had been formally handed over to him. But these signs of Rupert's growing up did not alarm the security of his aunts. Time, that had withered and wrinkled their once fair bodies, made no havoc in their hearts. For them time was not, and they lived for Rupert as though he would always be a child, and themselves always be there to guard him from the world.

He was protected from the spoiling effects of such a life, not only by the serious and absorbing interest of his art, but by a certain radiancy of physical health that permeated all his young growing life. Living as he did in an extremely simple community that was held intimately together in a mesh of affections, old intimacies, and family ties, he had never found it necessary to be anything but himself; and the predominance of the feminine element about him developed his masculinity, while it cultivated in him that gift of imaginative sympathy and understanding that is usually the best quality in a man

who has been much with affectionate women in his youth. He had a happy temperament, because he was delighted with his surroundings, and never questioned their permanence; and he was unconstricted by the intellectual narrowness of his world, because a pencil and a sheet of paper could always release him from it.

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Andy, the aged and rather shaky factotum, brought in the soup and sounded the gong, and the two old ladies rustled down to the dining-room, followed by Rupert, who took his place beneath the row of thin-lipped, long-nosed ancestors who had looked down upon him and followed him with their eyes in and out of the room ever since he was a baby. Andy shuffled about, now and then addressing some one in an undertone as he handed a dish — incorrigibly privileged, although no one heeded his undertone. "Just another spoonful, mem — them's fine broth," or "Sure, I told you to take the wings off first, Masther Rupert — that's no kind of a figure to make of th' old bird;" or, handing a dish of new potatoes — "That's the last of them, mem." These murmurs were usually addressed to Miss Jane, the younger and more practical of the two old ladies, on whom the cares of the house chiefly devolved. She sat opposite to Rupert, her hair divided under her white cap into two smooth bands of silver grey, under which her ruddy face and bright brown eyes showed that the autumn of her age was a very sunny one.

"I'm glad to see you eating such a good dinner,

Rupert," she said. "It's hardly fit for a growing young man like you to eat nothing all day but a few sandwiches."

She used the term "young man" as one uses it to boys of twelve. Rupert smiled good-humouredly.

"I'm afraid my circumference is the only thing that'll grow any more, auntie. I say, how good these peas are! Aren't they very early?"

"They came from the Castle garden, but I'm afraid she hasn't put quite enough butter in them. I don't know what's come over Anne lately; I think she must be fretting about her mother, poor old soul." And they talked on about the minutest trivialities — chiefly, indeed, about the dinner itself and the influences bearing on its goodness or badness — just the meaningless chatter of a family of human beings eating in company, touched in this case with a certain delicate anxious humanity, because two of the family were well-bred old ladies and kind, and one a youth whose eyes had seen only the sunshine of life.

They sat afterwards in the drawing-room with the windows open to the sun, that was setting behind the dark hills across the water. A cutter yacht, creeping down the lough with hardly a breath of wind in her sails, glided close up to the steep rocks on which the outer wall of the house was built. The people sitting in the lighted windows were clearly visible to the occupants of the yacht, for presently there was a hail —

"Rupert ahoy!"

"Hullo!" sang out Rupert.

"We're going for a picnic up to Green Island Sound on Monday. Russell is bringing the *Thistle* and the Moores are taking the steam launch. Will you come? Good evening, Miss Jane; I can see you better than you can see me!"

"It's Hamilton," said Rupert. "Yes, I'll come — rather; with pleasure. What time? Eleven? All right." And the white sails glided away, and the voices from the yacht grew fainter.

"Dear me," said Aunt Leonora, "the Moore girls must have come, then. We must really go and call, Jane. And the nieces are staying with Mrs. Hamilton, and there's Lady Fastnet at Ballyculter, so you'll be quite gay, Rupert, with all those young ladies! It'll be a good thing to take you away from your drawing for a day."

III

Rupert woke up next morning with that curious consciousness of Sunday known only to Protestant youth. It was in the sunbeams that slanted into his bedroom, it was in the drowsy hum of bees amid the garden flowers, in the undisturbed whistling and singing of the birds. He turned over in bed once or twice, then looked at his watch; it was only half-past six. He was wide awake, and presently he got up, bathed, and began to dress, discarding the loose flannel garments of week-days, and searching out stiff shirts, folded clothes, white collars. It was part of the observance of the day, in this Protestant corner of Ireland, that everything should be different from other days.

The house seemed still asleep as he went quietly downstairs and out through the open windows on to the lawn. The hush of Sunday morning was upon everything. The clear green water, as smooth as a pond, was sliding past the wooden piers supporting the edge of the lawn, and the two white rowing-boats that were tied up there tugged steadily but furtively at their painters. His little racing cutter, the *Maid of Lorne,* was swinging at her moorings; the bubbles talking under her planks; her sails all trimly furled;

and the club ensign, only flown on Sundays, already floating over her counter. They all, on this day, had the double attraction of forbidden pleasures, for to go out for amusement in a boat on Sunday, or to draw, or splice a rope or ply any craft, would have been a grave social misdemeanour. So Rupert merely looked at his boats with redoubled interest, and (since his mind did not observe the Sabbath) seriously pondered the effect of adding another seven feet to the *Maid of Lorne's* mast, and lengthening her boom and bowsprit. The little boat might have been aware of his thoughts, for she began to swing round a little on the current until she was end-on to him, as though to say: "Yes, look at my beam; I can stand more than that!" Rupert would have given a great deal to go on board of her and take a few measurements; he wondered how he could ever wait until to-morrow; but habit, and consideration for his aunts (who were stirring by this time, and could have seen him from their bedroom windows), prevailed against his impatience.

He turned away, and passed through a door into the walled garden. Even at that early hour the air there was warm and heavy, and the bourdon of bees hung over the flower-borders like a perfume too heavy to rise. Rupert hardly ever visited the garden except on Sundays, when his hands were necessarily idle, and when this pleasure of the senses had an opportunity of appealing to him. As he walked slowly up and down the gravel path between the trim borders, he breathed the perfumed air deeply and

deliberately, tasting it like a vintage, and consciously rejoicing to be alive.

He stood for a few minutes watching a snail in a damp corner luxuriously dragging itself across a leaf, its horns pricking straight up from the moist blackness of its head. Something in its gross contentment and obscure sensuality appealed to him; he furtively took out a pencil and a fragment of paper, turned his back on the snail, and began to draw. And as he worked the lines of discontent again appeared in his face; he looked up at a chaffinch which was uttering its bell-like sequence from the branch of an apple-tree close by, and then suddenly, with a gesture of disgust, crumpled up the paper and trod it into the earth. Then he felt hungry and went in to breakfast.

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They drove to church along the shore road; flanked on one side by the trees of Rathshene demesne, and on the other by the rocks and pebbles of the beach. Aunt Jane was severely occupied with her prayer-book; but Aunt Leonora was in a reminiscent mood, talking of people long dead, who had looked on those scenes and driven along that road before them. Rupert listened with interest, knowing by experience that these wandering comments led often into the most interesting and human stories of the dead past. A direct question would as likely as not dry up the pretty fountain of memories that bubbled in the old lady's mind; but Rupert was skilful in steering the talk in promising directions without appearing to be too interested.

"Oh, really?" he said, at the end of a long story about an uninteresting great-aunt; "I never knew that you and Aunt Jane had lived at Carrstown."

"We never lived there, dear, but, as I was telling you, we stayed there once with our Aunt Dalzell — when that curious thing happened about the visitor."

"You mean the visitor who —?"

"Did I never tell you about that? Dear me, your father used to like hearing about that. Oh, there's no story in it, it's just a thing that happened. Your aunt and I were staying with our Aunt Dalzell; Uncle Thomas had been dead for three years, and I was seventeen. The three of us were alone in the house except for the servants, who were all women; and it was June. We had just come down to breakfast one morning when we saw a stranger walking slowly up the drive, stopping to smell the flowers. You know that the house at Carrstown is nearly two miles from the road, and isn't on the way to any place, so you can think how surprised we were. We knew every one within twenty miles round us, and visitors weren't so common with us that we didn't know all about them long before they came to stay with any one.

"He sauntered along very slowly, looking about him as though he were enjoying the morning air. He had no hat on his head, and carried no stick or gloves; you would just think he had walked out of the house. As he came nearer we could see that he was very handsome — oh, such a really distinguished

face as he had! He was beautifully dressed, and you would have said that he was quite a young man, except that his hair — he had long, wavy hair — was grey."

Aunt Jane lifted her face from her prayer-book. "Indeed it was not grey, Leonora; there may have been a little grey on the temples, but his hair was as brown as Rupert's!" And she resumed her study of the psalms for the day.

"Your aunt was a good deal younger than I was, and perhaps doesn't remember so clearly," went on Miss Leonora. Rupert looked across at the younger sister, and saw her smiling almost derisively at the book. "But the young man came on up to the open window. Of course Aunt Dalzell went and spoke to him. 'Oh,' said he, 'I've been admiring your beautiful flowers so much. It fills one's heart with poetry to see them!' Those were his words, and you could tell from the way he spoke that he was an educated man. Such beautiful manners as he had, too! Even Aunt Dalzell was charmed with him, and asked him to stay and have breakfast. He talked about the flowers and birds in a way that enchanted us; but he never offered to say anything about who he was, or asked any questions about us, and we began to think that he was some eccentric visitor staying at Rathshene that we hadn't heard of.

"Well, he stayed all the morning, walking with us about the garden and wood; he was delighted with everything we showed him, and he stayed to lunch. After lunch Aunt Dalzell gave him a hint, and

asked could we drive him anywhere, as we were going to pay a visit; but he just said No, thank you, he couldn't be happier than he was, just walking about! and as he didn't show any signs of going away, we put off our drive and sat with him in the garden, and he repeated poetry to us. Such a memory as he had! And he had a beautiful voice, and you could see he felt what he said, and we were all enchanted to listen to him. I remember one verse that he repeated; and the beauty of it wasn't so much in the words as in the way he said it:

"'Pale gentle flower, with petals neat,
And shall I pluck thee, then?
Nay, rather spare a thing so sweet,
To be a joy to men!'"

The old lady steadied her voice against the shaking of the carriage into an almost hallowed tone — so potently did the unspoken romance of that June day long ago linger in her blood. After a pause she went on.

"But at dinner-time, as he showed no signs of going, Aunt Dalzell began to think it very odd; and several times she was on the point of saying something definite to him, but he disarmed her by some amiable or charming remark. So there was nothing for it but to ask him to stay to dinner; and after dinner he played and sang to us so delightfully (he had a sweet tenor voice) that no one noticed the time, and it was eleven o'clock before we realized it. It had come on to rain heavily; and Aunt Dalzell

couldn't bring herself to turn the stranger out of doors; so he was shown to a bedroom. Aunt came down afterwards, and said she had locked his door from the outside; and she took away all the silver and locked it up. When he wasn't there she was full of indignation at him; but so long as he had been with us, she was as much charmed as any of us.

"Well, we three were down pretty early the next morning, you may be sure; and aunt was just going to slip upstairs to unlock the stranger's door, when — suddenly he was in the room with us! I should tell you that, apart from his door having been locked, the stairs were very creaky, and a cat couldn't have come down without being heard. Besides, I was facing the dining-room door, and no one came in; yet there he was, bowing and smiling, and asking us how we had slept! We were all a little frightened, but Aunt Dalzell was a little ashamed, too, of having locked up the silver, and she was very nice to him. And then after breakfast, he walked out on to the terrace, and just disappeared! No one saw him go away; no one in the village or at Rathshene had ever seen such a person; he seemed to drop from the skies, and to go back to them."

"But do you mean to say," asked Rupert, "that you never found out who he was, or anything more about him?"

"Never certainly. It was said vaguely that he was a young man who was in the care of — well, of an attendant, and that the attendant had missed him the day before, but —"

"Leonora!" said Miss Jane, shutting her prayer-book with a snap. "I really wonder at you repeating that untruth to Rupert, when you know very well it was only a tale of Margaret Haffy's — a horrid girl, I always thought her."

And the two old ladies began to wrangle politely over the details of the quite uninteresting solution of the story — rather pathetically, as Rupert thought, whose mind was filled by the romantic side of his aunt's story — this unknown young man, with his early Victorian elegancies, and his verses and posies, drifting in upon the pretty, humdrum world of the two girls, and drifting out again, leaving the foot-print of romance on their lives.

The story had brought them to Rathshene; and as the carriage turned up the straggling High Street there were people on foot to be greeted with varying degrees of intimacy; the old ladies' bow to Mr. Gregson, the lawyer, with his bevy of daughters, suggested a certain distance exactly but cordially preserved, while a most formal inclination saluted the Wades and their English visitors. For the ragged and the poor, curtseying from cottage doors, or stepping aside to let the carriage pass, the two ladies kept their sweetest and kindliest smiles.

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There was nothing more familiar to Rupert than the scene inside the church, where since childhood he had Sunday by Sunday employed every device of thought and imagination to make tolerable the habitual vacancy of mind induced by the service. He had

counted everything in the church hundreds of times — the tiles on the floor, the spoon-shaped mouldings in the cornices, the panes of glass in the leaded windows and the pipes of the organ; he had performed imaginary acrobatic feats of climbing about the roof, and jumping from moulding to moulding, until he had got quite dizzy in his pew. But latterly he had found another interest for these irksome hours in a critical study of the young women within his view — those whose faces lent themselves to drawing, and those whose faces did not; those whom he could imagine himself kissing, and those who shocked his fastidiousness in that matter. One by one they had emerged from the vague background into the field of his attention, taking on each her own individuality; every Sunday, at this time of his life, revealed a new face, a woman's face where before there had only been a lay figure, a face round which his awakened imagination could play.

Mary O'Niell, for example, who for years had been merely a splash of brown and white in the second row of the choir, had last Sunday revealed herself as an extremely pretty girl whose brown dress clothed a lissom figure, and under whose white hat lay the mysterious coils of a woman's hair. And there were others, unknown to Rupert even by name, people who came in to church from distant farms, who engaged his attention and speculation. One woman especially, who sat with her profile to him, who to his unseeing eyes had appeared the same any time for the last ten years, had interested him in

a vague and almost distasteful way. She was always dressed in black, her hair was dark, and her face, which was not beautiful, had the blank paleness of paper; but Rupert found his eyes constantly straying towards her, and his mind and curiosity continually engaged with her — so much so, while her importance to him lasted, that if she were not in church he felt that the day was doubly blank. He was careful never to find out who she was; he fastidiously kept the world of his imagination separate from the world of fact; and nothing would have induced him to speak to her.

All Rupert's romances, which were many, had taken place hitherto in his own imagination. People, remarking his easy and self-possessed manners, said "How old he is for his age!" But really he was at heart so intolerably shy that he was afraid of any one finding out what a mask his man-of-the-world air was. To old people and to married women he always made love as though by instinct, paying ingratiating court to them which they found delightful. With the young women whom he had known from early boyhood he could never bring himself even to flirt; their frank familiarity and knowledge of each other made an insurmountable barrier.

But to-day, with the coming of the summer visitors, the familiar objects of his attention were overshadowed by several young women whom he had not seen before; people of his own class, dressed in the latest fashion, and providing his critical and curious eyes with much to admire in their clothes as well as

in their persons. In the pew with Mrs. Hamilton were her two pretty nieces, who seemed to have become demurer and prettier than ever; there was a whole party of young men and women in the Rathshene pew — one of the latter, with Titian hair and eyes downcast under a great shady hat, intrigued his curiosity; but it was a strange lady sitting by herself a few pews in front of him who interested Rupert most. She was young, but not girlish; she had a slim figure, pale gold hair, and exquisite clothes; she moved gracefully, she had an indescribable air of composure and yet of alertness that engaged Rupert's sympathies. She never turned her head, although she seemed to see out of the back of her fair neck. Rupert enjoyed this illusion greatly; he did not know that it was produced by the lady's certainty that her dress fitted her back admirably and that her hair was well done; nor, if he had known it, would the fact have interfered with his pleasure.

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He longed to see her face, but she kept it fixed on her prayer-book. The congregation mumbled through the service with its usual confused mutter, corrected only by Mr. Gregson, who articulated every syllable in a harsh rolling voice, and with great play of lips, and who consequently recited the last half of every response in the midst of an impressive silence.

"Because there is notherth fith frus btonly Thououlord," said the congregation; and "for us, but *only* Thou, O Lord," added Mr. Gregson, that

there might be no misapprehension in high quarters as to the exact nature of the position.

And so the service muttered and rumbled its way along, and Rupert grew more excited as it drew to an end and the moment approached when he should see her face. At last the blessing was given; and Rupert grudged the few seconds that followed it in which he must remain with bent head. He got his hat and fidgeted; one by one the heads round him bobbed up, as though some constraining bonds had been cut; but still the lady in front did not move. People were moving out and beginning to throng the little aisle before she slowly raised her head and rose gracefully from her knees. She collected her books, handkerchief, sunshade, and moved out, coming down the aisle towards Rupert; but just in front of her walked Tom Neligan, whose face, red like the setting sun, blotted her out completely. As Rupert moved, the red face moved, lurching along always between him and the fair features; and it was not until she was on the point of passing his seat that Rupert saw her face. Even then it was only half visible behind her veil, and he had an impression of pale grey-blue eyes, a firm mouth, the fairest of skins, and an atmosphere of mystery and remoteness.

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She had gone away by the time Rupert and his aunts had reached the church door, and he became involved in the usual Sunday greetings. There were the Gregsons to be shaken hands with, introductions to the Rathshene house-party, the pretty Miss Ham-

iltons to be fussed over. The carriages did not come to the church on fine Sundays, but waited down at the bottom of the street beside the little harbour, and the stroll down there, split into chosen groups, and displaying a variety of splendid attire, was one of the social events of this little world. Rupert walked with the Miss Hamiltons, and for the time forgot the unknown lady.

"I do hope the weather will be fine to-morrow; I am longing to see Green Island again, and that beautiful sound," said Millie Hamilton, looking at Rupert out of her fine dark eyes. "Do you think it will be fine, really now, Mr. Savage?"

"Sure to be," said Rupert, who approved of these young ladies. "Are you going in the *Dryad* with your uncle? You'd better come with me in the *Maid of Lorne,* and we'll race him."

"Oh, what fun that would be!" said Betty, the younger sister. "Do let's go with Mr. Savage, Millie, and he'll let me steer."

"I'm not so sure about that, if we want to get there first," said Rupert ungallantly. "Wait and see. Anyhow, you both come with me — I'll settle that with your aunt."

They went on talking about the next day's expedition, and exchanging laughing reminiscences of a similar day the year before. At the bottom of the street they waited by the quay-side for their elders to come down, and were joined by other groups of young people — the Gregson "girls," who ranged from eighteen to forty, and had all weather-beaten

faces and hard sea-blue eyes. They lived in the open air, in boats and on bicycles, but chiefly in boats, which they managed with the daring of yachtsmen and the cunning of old fishermen. You could see the effect of the weather on the family in stages. The youngest girl was very pretty, and merely freckled; but the colour deepened as you ascended the family scale. Aminta, the eldest, was burned a deep brick-red, and walked with a roll like an old shellback. On week-days she looked effective and business-like, dressed in a blue jersey, short serge skirt, and tam-o'-shanter; but on Sunday, in a flimsy lace gown and very feminine hat, there was an air almost of impropriety about her. Her brick-red complexion looked like some Tibetan pigment, and her chains and jewelled pins were like the adornments of an idol. The father, old Gregson, who had twenty-five years' start of his eldest daughter, and added the influence of port to that of the weather, was almost black.

"How are you, Rupert?" hailed Miss Aminta. "Is it true what they're saying, that you're going to step the *Maid's* mast further forrard? Ah, sure it would be a shame — you'll never get her to look half a point nearer the wind than she does at present, and you'll just take the life out of her."

"Oh, I don't know, Miss Gregson; it improved the *Red Rose*."

"The *Red Rose*? What is the boy talking of, at all? Will you tell me if the *Red Rose* is anything like the shape of the *Maid*? For patience's sake let

the old boat alone, when she's the fastest thing of her size on the lough."

Rupert continued to discuss the matter, the Miss Hamiltons respectfully listening; but he inwardly resolved to consider Miss Aminta's words, knowing that on such a subject they were of weight, and not lightly given.

The other members of her family gradually assembled, talking of the weather in harsh and yet somehow agreeable voices, until they were all there in a row, beginning with Mrs. Gregson, whose face was rose-pink. Pink, freckles, tan, brown, crimson, brick-red, black; and the family spectroscope was complete.

"Well, good morning, ladies," sang out old Gregson, who was called the Commodore; "come along, girls;" and, as if at the signal of a flagship, the family, under all plain sail, and with their skirts held up in front like anchors atrip, bore away in his wake, Mrs. Gregson towing somewhat heavily beside the Commodore.

And with much talk and laughter and making of arrangements for the following day, the gay groups gradually dispersed, the carriages drove away, and the little village settled down to its sunny Sunday quiet, broken only by the lap of waves against the quay-side, the voices of the gulls plunging and quarrelling over some offal, and the shuffling feet of the silent, stiffly-clad group of Sunday loiterers leaning against the public-house wall.

IV

"Do tell me about your drawing; I am interested in that. Oh, how I envy any one who has a real art to express himself in!"

The impossible had come true; Rupert was sitting alone under the shade of the ivy-clad wall of a ruin, with the unknown fair lady beside him — no longer unknown, but revealed as a clever, graceful, well-informed, friendly, and wholly delightful mortal called Lady Fastnet. And it had happened so easily and naturally. Rupert had sailed up to Green Island Sound with the Miss Hamiltons, Nora Gregson, and one or two others who had overflowed their own boats; he had laughed and joked and chatted and enjoyed himself, and had even begun a laughing, long-deferred flirtation with Millie Hamilton. And then, as they had landed, they had met the party that had gone up in the Moores' steamer; suddenly he had seen her in a spotless white dress, standing chatting with Mrs. Graham of Ballyculter, had blushed, had been introduced, and had promptly captured the lady's heart (she was feeling a little bored, and rather hopeless of finding much human interest) by the whole-hearted admiration that had beamed from his brown eyes. Rupert's shyness being

of the spirit, and not apparent in his manners, he had quite unconsciously set himself to captivate her, with an address and daring which an older man might have envied.

At first his attentions had necessarily been divided. He was too polite to abandon his fair passengers all at once, but he skilfully mingled Lady Fastnet with them, so that at lunch they made a merry little group by themselves, and he could look at her while he talked to them. She was witty and amusing and youthful — she was only twenty-seven — so that the girls soon lost their stiffness with her and forgot that she was a married woman — a state of things that meant in their world an abandonment of youthful interests and frivolous joys.

Geraldine Fastnet was not sorry to find herself once more in an environment of girlhood and boyhood. She had been the eldest of a family of ten, and the cleverest and not the least pretty of six pretty sisters, who had grown up like flowers in the poor soil of a worn-out family, and amid the weeds of a rather miserable and inferior stock-grazing county society. An old family, and a dying; and, like many in Ireland, blossoming out, in its very death-throes, into these flowers of daughters; the sons weak and degenerate, only hastening the extinction of the name. Geraldine had been married at eighteen to Lord Fastnet, a young, poor, proud, extremely pious and rather stupid hawbuck; by accident, and because his relatives in the elder branch had all subsided into convents and lunatic asylums, a Catholic Peer; own-

ing many acres of bog, and an ugly, gloomy tumble-down castle of the eighteenth century.

This young man had been strictly brought up by priests; he had never been out of Ireland except when he had been to school in Belgium; he was advised to marry for the apostolic reasons — to avoid incontinence and to beget children. Whereupon this gay and pretty Geraldine, willing enough to be a Countess and to escape from the crowding competition of home life, with its rather irritating division and apportionment of dresses, dances, visits, and other amusements, and equipped with the Catholic combination of innocence and shame, was thrown to the lusty young Fastnet as a live rabbit is thrown to a starving python. Such was her introduction to one set of the facts of life. The church had terrified her into obedience and submission, and encouraged him with the grave sensuality of a Puritan Catholicism: with a result that any civilized society might look upon with shame, if it had the courage to look at all.

The prolonged horror of the honeymoon had come to an end at last. Geraldine had tasted the bitter degradation of having been given, for the mere relief of his symptoms, to a man whom she did not love; and Lord Fastnet, his brief season of song and gay plumage over, returned to Castle Fastnet, where he relapsed into the quagmire of bucolic Catholicism and the drifting sloth engendered by the soft, misty climate. Soon he neglected to shave, and became an object of physical repulsion to his wife. She bore

him no child, to her secret joy, but an express grievance of his; and having, after six years of hell, arrived at a state of neutrality and found a *modus vivendi,* she began to live, and he began to die. The process was slow, beginning at the extremities, with gout in the feet and incipient softening of the brain, and was destined to last thirty years before the centres of life gave out.

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Geraldine had come on a visit to her friend at Ballyculter, and was, of course, included in the invitation for the Hamiltons' picnic. She thought Rupert much the most attractive of the young people about her, and had readily fallen in with his suggestion that they should stroll off after lunch to where they could get a view of the sound; and thus it happened that she was sitting beside him, under the ruined wall, looking down on the landlocked waters of the sound. The Miss Gregsons had led off most of the other young people, to indulge in violent games; the elders were sitting about on the sward, gossiping; Rupert and Lady Fastnet had the ruin to themselves.

"Do tell me about your drawing."

"I don't know that there's anything to tell. I can show you some things, if you like, but probably you'll hate them. Every one says I draw ugly things; certainly I don't see any use in drawing pretty things, because any one can see their prettiness for himself. I'm afraid I'm rather a rotter, you know, because I can't help sticking things in

out of my head — all sorts of things. I see expressions in things: look at that water — it's smiling, as plainly as anything could smile — like some one smiling in their sleep — you know what I mean. And that branch of a tree — it's leering at us; don't you see?" And he whipped a pencil from his pocket, and on the back of an envelope drew the gnarled bough in a few swift strokes that certainly expressed a rather sinister smile.

"It's rather rot, isn't it?" he said, growing a little red as he felt that he had been "giving himself away." "But it makes it interesting for me; you know what I mean; it's the way I see things."

He looked up, and found the lady's clear eyes resting, not on the drawing, but on his face.

"What are you looking at me like that for?"

"I'm not looking at you 'like that.'"

"Yes, you are. Have I said anything extra silly? I can't talk to the people here much about my work, you know; they aren't interested — you know what I mean; but you seem to understand, although I daresay you think me rather an ass."

"Now you're fishing, but you're not going to catch anything. Let me see that drawing again, will you?"

She took it up and looked at it closely, paying absolutely no attention to Rupert's confused and rather abject depreciation of it.

"Do you know Sibley's work at all?" she asked presently.

"No," said Rupert. "I know nothing, see noth-

ing, learn nothing down here. When you told me just now that you'd really seen all those impressionist pictures we were talking about, I felt quite sick. I only know them from the illustrated art papers I get. By Jove, those fellows really *are* trying!"

"I wonder," said Lady Fastnet to herself, looking at him.

"What do you wonder, dear lady?" said Rupert, blushing, after all, when he said "dear lady," although he had been making up his mind to say it for five minutes.

"I am wondering, dear sir, if those very people wouldn't say exactly that about you, if they saw your work. They would say, 'Anyway, he tries.' But I'm coming to see your aunts some afternoon, and you must show me your serious work. Will you? That will be so nice of you, Mr. Savage." She looked at him, half smiling, half wondering.

"I say, Lady Fastnet, will you do me a favour?"

"If I can."

"Do you mind very much not calling me Mr. Savage — do you mind calling me Rupert? Every one I like does, and —"

The lady suddenly looked grave, even haughty. "Mr. Savage! Really, I think you are presuming in our very short acquaintance."

Rupert, flushing scarlet, looked down on the ground, and did not see the expression of mock-haughtiness suddenly disappear from Lady Fastnet's face, to be replaced by a shining friendly regard.

But when he raised his eyes to reply, yes — no — was she laughing at him? Could she really? —

She rippled a merry laugh, and for a second let her fingers rest on his coat sleeve. "Did you really think I was such an abject prig as that? Of course I'll call you Rupert, as long as I like you as much as I do now."

"That is charming of you," said Rupert, his self-possession quite restored, but still a little intoxicated by the touch of her fingers. "And you really do like me — I mean — you know what I mean."

"Yes, I-know-what-you-mean," said the lady, mimicking him. "If I didn't like you I shouldn't be sitting here with you, should I? *Voila!*"

"How jolly you are! I am quite serious. You didn't know about me in church yesterday, but I was looking at you."

"Fancy! How could I have lived yesterday, not 'knowing about you'! But don't let's talk nonsense. Do you know I'd never been in a Protestant church in my life before yesterday? Did I do everything all right? You wouldn't have known? Splendid! You see I'm a Catholic."

Rupert had a pleasant mild sense of traffic with the devil. "No, I shouldn't have guessed. But why did you come?"

"Curiosity. It would be as much as my life is worth down in the south; why, even my people would have a fit if they knew! It's as bad as that with us."

They talked on, rushing into knowledge of each

other on the seven-league strides of youth and curiosity. While their voices made the sounds and words of conversation, their eyes talked more swiftly, glancing the dot-and-dash of the emotional code; for they were full in youth's sunshine, she catching the light from his brighter mirror and flashing it back to him in heliograph. Now they were a world apart; a turn of her head, and he had reached the equator; a glance of eyes, and only a thousand miles divided them; an idea shared, and he was a hundred miles nearer; a steadying and meeting of glances, and the compass in his heart dipped and spun to the influence of the magnetic pole itself — only to find it ringed with ice, and the lady near by to the sight only, and unapproachable across that cold barrier.

This ancient game doubtless seemed the more fascinating to the players because of their complete lack of intention. The lady, by marriage cut off, as she thought, from the mainland of youth and adventure, saw him borne towards her on a swift current, and was glad of the prospect of company on her island. Because of his youth, and the deep and wide seas surrounding her, she prepared no defences; a mere boy, this; some one, surely, whom she could frankly make her friend, without danger from inquiring eyebrows or from explosive qualities in the friendship itself. Her ladyship was as young as that, you see.

As for Rupert, here was a lady entirely lovable, and therefore to be made love to. It was all heart

and soul and head with him; the flesh that impelled him was as yet deep hidden from his consciousness, and only sending these powerful vapours into heart and soul and head; love was an affair of kisses and sweet words and holding of hands and eternal spiritual companionship. The lady, being married, could not be expected to love him; but if only she would allow him to love her!

At this adolescent stage the great passion is a very single affair. "Bother being loved!" it cries; "let me love, let me love!" The beautiful instinct of the chase is awakened, but it is as a means to no end; rather it is the end itself, and capture only a possible dilemma at the end of it. "Let me capture this fellow-creature," says Love in his shepherd days; "no doubt I shall find something to do with her when I have caught her." Later, when the capture has become the important thing, man gives up the chase, contenting himself with setting a trap in one of the well-marked runs of the fair pursued. There he waits, until the click and cry are heard. It is the wisest plan, perhaps; for those who chase the flying nymph must beware of gins themselves; she has been known to leave them in her tracks. Then indeed, when one of the pursuers is caught, what a bellowing and dragging of mangled limbs, trap and all, out of the forest shade into the sunlight; what a gory trail, what panic legislation concerning the setting of traps!

Lady Fastnet's absolute innocence of any intention of flirting with a boy of twenty, combined with

her complete inability to help being charmed, and therefore very charming, settled poor Rupert's business for him in the space of an hour and a half. Falling in love herself was not one of the possibilities that life held for her, and so she abandoned herself the more readily to this shy and yet shameless wooer, who turned his whole personality upon her in a golden stream. She took for granted the safety of her own heart, immured within the grey walls of duty, and she regarded with a naïve and tender curiosity the offer of this curious youth, who knew so little what he offered. She was not, because of her own immunity, much concerned about his heart — the whole subject of hearts in this connection being one of which she was rather ignorant. She knew that there were certain danger signals occasionally shown by the men among her friends, and that there was a code of answering and discouraging signals, which instinct and training had taught her: that was all. It was not within her experience to have a young man of twenty pouring out before her the first treasures of a poet's heart, and bringing to bear on her the battery of a most attractive personality, a keen intelligence, and a half-fledged sense of artistic mastery that only needed her help to mount on strong wings. Least of all was it within her experience to be wooed by a creature who was half impulsive boy, half self-possessed and commanding man, and who had the native art to lay his life at her feet without saying a word about it.

Their talk was indeed quite too commonplace to

reproduce in type; it was the kind of talk in which words are nothing, tones and glances everything. In their duet, that sounded through the afternoon to the accompaniment of the talking water, his was the voice that sang, and hers the one that interrupted, interrogated, or made harmonies. When he spoke of the brimming waters of the sound, he was really saying, "Look at them with my eyes; look from them into me!" When they talked of the ruined castle, and the brave, loud-shouting passions that had echoed about its crumbling walls, his eyes said, "Learn about me; know what is in me of those ancestors who fought and fell here; they are dead, the castle is in ruins, but I am alive!" And when they spoke of his home, his interests, his affection for the old ladies, his drawing, his heart cried, "These are things that I love; look at them, know them, like them a little because I love them, learn from my love for them what my love for you may be!"

. . . . . .

The party were already seated at tea when they returned, raked by merciless young eyes. Rupert envied Lady Fastnet the complete self-possession with which she devoted herself to the elder ladies. They had been inclined to criticise her absence, but her attractive pleasure in their company, and whole-hearted admiration for the beautiful sound, soon disarmed them. Rupert was conscious of a sense of exhilaration as he sat down among the young people, and took his part in the high-spirited, good-natured

chaff of such occasions. He felt kindly towards every one, and treated Miss Hamilton with an almost paternal affection which that young lady found most attractive. He did not let his eyes wander towards the group of elders very often; the radiance that was illuminating them reached him through other senses than that of sight. Once indeed, when he had looked, he had been conscious of a faint feeling of disgust at the sight of her in laughing conversation with a middle-aged facetious gentleman in red Dundreary whiskers; after that he looked no more.

They played games after tea — old-fashioned games, which were understood by the elders to be a concession to the young people, and by the young people to be a concession to the elders. The grey walls of the castle echoed to laughter and voices, and the figures of girls skimmed over the sward, like flying nymphs whom no satyr pursued. Lady Fastnet did not join in these revels, but looked on with the elders; and in the evolutions of the game often had sight of the slim, clean Rupert, pursued or pursuing. But it was not until the slanting sunbeams had given the signal for baskets to be packed and boats to be manned, and each craft had received her complement of passengers that the new-formed friends had any speech with each other. Rupert, with a coolness that won the frank admiration of his party, manœuvred Lady Fastnet into his own cutter for the homeward sail, and established her with cushions and rugs beside him where he sat at the tiller.

Once on board he was more autocratic than ever. "Move over here a little, please, and then you'll be clear of the main-sheet. The other side, please, Miss Hamilton — that's right. Just take a turn of those halliards, Miss Gregson, and haul aft your weather jib-sheet. All clear, Sam?"

"All clear, sir!" sang out the man in the bows, who was stripping the long seaweeds from the anchor; and they glided through the sound with a dying breeze and in the orange glow of sunset.

There were two or three short tacks to be made in order to get out of the sound, and an intricate navigation of the narrow entrance, in which Rupert distinguished himself by getting ahead of the other boats and establishing a lead for the race home. Close behind him was Mr. Hamilton's cutter, carrying more sail, but laden more heavily than the *Maid of Lorne;* and for a few minutes the excitement of a race occupied them all. But as the *Maid of Lorne* drew away from her pursuer and settled down on the long reach home, general conversation broke out again, and the indefatigable group over the cabin-hatch began to practise making knots and splices, with much argument and manual interference.

Rupert had a sense of triumph, god-like and exhilarating, in the presence of his lady beside him in the little cock-pit. The talk of the others mingled with the bubble of water against the planks veiled their voices, and the growing darkness veiled their faces.

"Do you like it?" asked Rupert, after a long silence.

"Yes, I like it."

"Are you happy?"

"I wonder. Yes." Geraldine felt herself bewitched, drifting on some tide, half ashamed of herself for seeming to encourage the admiration that trembled in this boy's tones, half conscious of feeling very like a girl beside him, and then stifling her conscience with the thought that she could be of use to him, that she would be good for him.

Presently, under cover of the friendly twilight, Rupert spoke again.

"Do you mind very much if I ask you something?"

"Not a bit. What is it?"

"That." She felt a hand laid on her own as it rested on the deck.

"Oh, Rupert," she said pleadingly, "please don't spoil it by anything silly! You know very well that is only foolishness —" but she did not move her hand from under his. Rupert's hand was warm and trembling over her cold one; but his voice was steady, reassuring, matter-of-fact.

"Now, that's very selfish of you," he said; "does it make you very uncomfortable to have your hand in mine?"

"No, of course not; but what good does it do?"

"It makes me very happy; so you haven't a ghost of an excuse. Please —" as the cold hand made a movement of withdrawal, and then resigned itself.

She laughed quietly. "You are very obstinate, and I'm still not sure that you aren't silly as well; but we won't make a fuss about such a small thing. There now."

She gave him her hand frankly into his own with a movement that robbed the situation of any subtlety; it was gently and timidly caressed as though it were a treasure of porcelain. It was as cold and unresponsive as porcelain too, but Rupert was unconscious of that. He was conscious only of himself and of her, that they were together, that he was touching her. For ten minutes he desired no other happiness.

Then the wish to be answered woke in him.

"How cold your hand is! Can't I make it as happy as mine?"

"I'm afraid I don't feel happiness in my hands — except when I'm playing the piano. They are always cold."

"Are you glad your hand is in mine?"

"Not particularly. I can't pretend to be thrilled, you know, when I'm not. How lovely those clouds are, with the moonlight coming behind them."

"Yes, but look here, you know what I mean, I'm so awfully — "

"Keep your luff, sir, keep your luff!" came in a hoarse voice from the gloom in the bows. "Sure, Mr. Hamilton's walking away from us now, sir — that's him to windward. I think we're close enough to Black Rock, your honour."

Rupert withdrew his hand, and guiltily brought the boat up to the wind.

"What in the world are you doing, Rupert, to let him get past?" asked Miss Gregson indignantly. "I declare to goodness they'll be laughing at us all night. Did he fall asleep, Lady Fastnet?"

"I think he was very near it," she said. "Little boys ought not to be kept out so late; he ought to have been tucked up an hour ago."

"Damn!" said Rupert pettishly, and very like a little boy. "We'll beat him yet." And he set his teeth, looked up at the luff of the sail, and glanced into the darkness.

"We're close enough, sir," repeated the man.

"Plenty of water yet," answered Rupert. "We've got a breeze here, and if we hang on on this tack we can get to windward of him when he goes about."

"Mercy, Rupert, don't go in any closer," said Miss Gregson; "it's all right by daylight, but the tide'll put you on to the outer shoal before you can see."

"Look here, Miss Gregson, we're going to beat him. You've got the best eyes; will you go forward and sing out when you see the broken water? Not a second before — honour bright?"

"All right," said the lady, entering into the daredevil spirit at once; "but be ready when I shout."

The yacht skimmed on with the freshening breeze, every eye on board peering ahead into the darkness.

"Lee ho!" sang out Miss Gregson sharply; and

the *Maid of Lorne* shot up into the wind and went about on the other tack, showing them for an instant a glimmer of foam on the shore a stone's cast away.

"Near enough," muttered the man; but the yacht now drew ahead of her rival, and crossed her bows, and had dropped her anchor off the boatslip at Rathshene before the Hamiltons appeared.

"How could you be so rash?" asked Lady Fastnet, who had been talking to some of the others, and came to bid Rupert good-night before she was driven away.

"It was your fault," he said, as he took her hand. "Good-night." And then, "You'll come on Tuesday?"

"Yes, I will if I can," she answered. "But you know very well whose fault it was."

V

She came on a day of south-west showers, late in the afternoon, when Rupert had almost given her up. He had thought about her so much in the interval, and so excitedly, that the reality of her presence was cooling and quieting, and made him feel that their former friendly intercourse was a dream. She had met the old ladies before, and was delighted to come and pay her court to them; but Rupert found the time of general conversation long and trying.

At last she said, turning to him, "I hope you will keep your promise, and show me your work before I go — will you? It would be so kind."

"Oh, if you are interested, I shall be delighted," said Rupert artificially; "if you don't mind coming to my den you can see the whole collection."

"And I hope you'll give him some good advice, Lady Fastnet," called Miss Leonora as they went out at the door; "perhaps he'll listen to you when he won't to us."

"You promise you won't laugh at me, but tell me what you really think?"

"I promise," said the lady simply; and they

went down the garden towards the water-side, through a shrubbery, and came out on a row of old buildings that had been used as stores and lofts long ago, and were now in a state of ruinous decay.

"Mind where you step; those boards are rotten," said Rupert as they went under the archway into a dim green twilight. He took a key from his pocket, opened a door on the left, and Lady Fastnet drew a sudden breath of surprised pleasure.

She saw a vast room with a long window on one side, below which the still green water rippled against the timbered wall. One end was devoted to boat-gear of all kinds, and was like a marine store. There were coils of ropes, tins of paint and varnish, spars, cases of brass-work, anchors, cushions, oars, rowlocks, chains, signal flags in lettered pigeon-holes, a big model schooner-yacht with mildewed sails, a compass, leads and lines, fishing-tackle, grapnels and a hundred other things that go to the equipment of well-found boats. The other end was furnished like a studio, with easels, bookcase, a high drawing-desk, an old chair or two, chests of drawers, and a litter of paper, portfolios, and canvases. In a far corner stood an old harpsichord, and over all hung a mingled aroma of tar, hemp, paint, and sea-weed.

"What a wonderful place!" She stood and let her eyes take in all the satisfying details. She looked from one end to the other, and then at Rupert.

"Do you mean to say you can really work here?" she asked. "Aren't you continually wanting to

splice a rope when you are drawing, or draw when you are working with those chains and things?"

"I don't know. If I want to draw, I draw, and if I want to fiddle about with boat-gear, I do that."

She shook her head. "Bad, very bad. Now let me see."

He opened two or three portfolios, and spread out the contents, watching her eagerly as she turned over the drawings. He learned nothing from her calm face except that she was interested. "You see, I told you they were no good. No one but me knows what they're even meant to be. Don't look at those silly things — even I can see that they're all out of drawing. Here, let me —"

"Oh, do be quiet," she said, gently putting her hand on his wrist and pushing it away. "You don't expect me to chatter about them, do you?" And he turned away, contented.

. . . . . .

They were strange compositions, some of them glaringly bizarre and far-fetched; others, the best, remarkable for a kind of pregnant simplicity of line, and a wayward but entirely conscious concentration of detail. Many of them had the fault of literary rather than pictorial purpose; drawing was subordinated to criticism, or narrative, or in some cases to a curious, half-cynical commentary on their subjects. One, called "The Gates of Heaven," showed an imposing and formidable barrier of gates amid mountains and clouds; the gates were wrought and chased with endless scrolls and devices on their

massive bars and hinges, and there was a suggestion of immense difficulty and complication in the machinery for opening them; but the decorative design had included several interstices near the bottom, and through these a stream of minute human figures was flowing quietly in. Another, called "The Last Man in the World," showed a segment of the earth's circle in space, dead, ice-bound, with a star setting beyond it; silhouetted against the immense circle, a lonely human figure, no bigger than a fly; and extending from him to the foreground, over a distance that the cleverly-handled, exaggerated perspective suggested to be thousands of miles, a line of wolves, pin-points in the distance, winding among rocks and hummocks and ice-mountains, growing bigger as the magnifying vision of the spectator traced the winding procession across frozen continents — all doggedly following the man's trail with the precision and inevitableness of nightmare. The same trick of immense space condensed within a few lines, like a world seen through a magnifying and condensing lens, was used in "The North Pole" — a powerful realization of aching desolation; but in all of these there was a suggestion of the grotesque, revealing either a mockery or a wittiness that equally vitiated and contradicted the spirit of the drawing.

Lady Fastnet said very little; she shuddered over "The Last Man" and smiled at "The Gates of Heaven," Rupert nervously anticipating shudders and smiles, and explaining them away. He was a

little disappointed with his friend; she seemed to be interested enough in his drawings, but almost impatient of him, and quite neglectful of his comments and explanations.

"What in the world — ?" she had turned to a group of sketches made on Gunn's Island; over and over again the same thing begun and left unfinished apparently on the eve of realization — the swimming, sliding water, the vicious, mysterious lines of the current, the space of blank white paper that seemed to be actually rising and swelling above the confining line.

"There, you've found those things. I can't help it — I can't leave off drawing that bit of water, though I suppose it's quite mad of me to try for it in black and white. But I see it in lines and shapes that have expression — faces — you know what I mean. . . ."

"Indeed, I don't think I do know what you mean." She turned towards him. "I wonder if you know yourself? Have you any idea how good some of this work is — and how bad?"

"No, neither," he answered stoutly, although flushing with pleasure. "I don't know that it's so very good — or so frightfully bad either. But perhaps you'll like this."

He uncovered a big sheet of cardboard, displaying a drawing quite different from anything he had yet showed her. It was called "The King's Daughter" — a richly-dressed woman, a huge ape feasting from elaborate dishes, a leering evil face peering through

the curtains of the tent. The subject was so surprising and inexplicable that she did not at once examine the drawing. "What King's daughter?" she asked.

"Don't you know? in the 'Arabian Nights,'" he answered. "I thought it was such a wonderful scene to draw. Here — I'll find it for you," and he turned to his shelves and took down a leather volume and opened it. "Read it — it won't take you a minute."

She turned to the window with the book, but she had only read a few sentences when he heard an exclamation, "My dear Rupert, what an odd story!" But she went on reading, and then he remembered, and wished that the floor would open and swallow him up. Evil was never objective with him; he had given her the book in perfect innocence, and with the calm, unconscious interest of the artist in his subject; but suddenly he saw her as a woman, reading Sir Richard Burton's very straightforward rendering of that terrible and immortal Persian anecdote; and flames chased over his body. Would she never put it down? He watched her turning the page, her face absolutely expressionless, the lines of her mouth set a little harder than usual. Not until she came to the end, and had read of the coming of the Destroyer of delights and the Sunderer of societies, and the ascription of praise to Allah the all-knowing, the Author of all things visible and invisible, did she put down the book and turn to the drawing with a colder and more critical counte-

nance. She noticed Rupert's confusion, and was very quick to make any apology impossible for him, beginning at once to talk about the drawing in calm business-like tones that gradually smoothed away his sense of agonized embarrassment.

There was the princess, clothed in fabrics of the most exquisite, elaborate pattern, handling dishes of brass and gold, and chased flagons and platters; there was the ape, terrifying and elemental; but the power of the thing, and its true horror, was in the face of the butcher peeping in behind the curtain, half terrified, half leeringly excited; and in the suggestion of the desert through the opening in the curtain — that edge of the salt desert to which this desolate passion had banished itself.

"Yes — I see. That pattern on the cloak is wonderful; but — what horrible things you imagine! What faces! Where in the world do you find your models?"

"I imagine them," said Rupert. "The faces of real people are so uninteresting — there's nothing to draw in them — I mean most faces," he added boldly. "You see, I don't care for faces, and I do care for drawing. Hence the ape."

"I begin to see," she said, sitting down opposite "The King's Daughter." They had for the time been less conscious of each other as they had become absorbed in the work; in fact, the surprise she felt at its excellence and originality, the power and maturity in it, made Rupert himself seem at once a little more distant from her, and a little more im-

portant. It was impossible for her to identify the healthy, happy, ingratiating owner of the *Maid of Lorne* with the inventor of these masterly, bizarre, and sometimes morbid creations. Yet there he was, smiling before her, his equanimity quite restored.

. . . . . .

"Yes, do smoke, and sit down for a minute and talk to me, you strange boy. Of course you know you have immense talent — genius perhaps; no one has it without knowing it. What are you going to do with it? Are you going to live here all your life?"

"Heavens, no! At least — well, my aunts are always talking, you know; they put things off rather; we are all a bit behind the times down here — you know what I mean."

"Yes, I do know, and it rather shocks me. Never mind your aunts for the moment; what about you? Are you going to leave your life altogether in their hands?" Her sky-grey eyes grew brighter as she leaned forward, eagerly speaking. "What are you going to do with all this? Do you believe, as I do, that any power or ability you have is a thing intrusted to you, to be cultivated and improved? I love pictures and beautiful things, and I know enough about painting and drawing to see that you are infinitely clever, but I want to know more than that. Oh, Rupert, surely it's just as easy to draw beautiful things and good things, or to see what's good and fine in everything, as it is to make these terrible inventions, and to discover hidden, ugly

sides of things? That picture is wonderful; but why draw it? why choose to decorate such a horrible and diseased idea? Perhaps you think it very impertinent of me to talk like this when I know you so little, but then — "

"We are friends; you can say anything you like to me, and I shall only be too grateful. I've no one to take any interest in my work, and no one to please except myself. Now I've got you, perhaps it will be different. I don't know," he added doubtfully.

"Why?"

"Because — well, you see, all you say about good things and beautiful things seems all right to me now I'm only talking about it; but if I had a pencil in my hand, it would all go out of my head, and — I hope you don't mind — you know what I mean — it would seem unimportant. I quite agree with you that in one way that may be a beastly picture — I suppose it's a beastly story — I never looked at it that way," he added simply. "It interested me to draw it. I'll tear it up if you like."

"I would never forgive you if you did. I suppose you can only draw the things that interest you — but I wish that you were content to see the beauty in ordinary things. Perhaps that will come — you're only a boy yet, you know." And she looked, laughing, into his eyes.

"I am quite aware that one is still in one's cradle at twenty-one," said Rupert in a very elderly manner; "in that case one needs a nurse. Will you be my nurse?"

"I'm afraid I could never manage you — you would soon grow out of my control. . . . But we must go back to your aunts. I want you to promise me something."

"Anything you like, dear nurse."

"No, seriously." It was she who felt shy and embarrassed now, and Rupert who seemed self-possessed and assured, and years older than she, because he was on his own ground. "Promise you'll think over what I said about doing something seriously — will you?" They were both standing up, and she put her hand in his, with a pretty gesture of appeal and confidence.

"I promise," said Rupert, enclosing it in both his, and giving it a little shake and pressure. Her attitude was girlish and timid, and his, re-assuring and almost paternal; but she was cold and unmoved, while he thrilled and was disturbed.

Then they went back to the house.

VI

While Lady Fastnet's visit lasted, she and Rupert were often together. They met at the various social gatherings that enlivened the Rathshene summer, and often she was with him, or with Miss Gregson, when these two nautical rivals had sailing matches; and he taught her to steer and handle a boat, and in other ways established the superiority necessary to counterbalance his inferiority in years and experience. His devotion to her was so romantic, so boyish and delicate in its expression, that she had no opportunity to discourage it, even if she had wanted to; the mother and the girl in her both responded to him whole-heartedly, and only the married woman, to whom he laid no siege, held aloof and was secretly a little ashamed at the bare thought that she might be accused of "carrying on" with Rupert. They talked about themselves and each other, and everything under the sun, and Rupert felt more and more conscious of some strength and growing purpose in himself, which as yet he did not trouble to analyze or discover. There was a sparkling coolness in the animation of Lady Fastnet that baffled and discouraged the occasional restless

stirrings and strainings at the leash of the pack of young hounds within him; when he was in her presence they never troubled him.

Only when she was absent, his imagination would sometimes approach the verge of something vague and wonderful, a mystery of the senses that he longed and yet feared to penetrate; and at such times he would design a more intimate approach to her, would deliberately plan to make love to her — only to feel when he was with her again that some invisible barrier mercifully prevented him, and that in disobedience to the carnal prompter there lay peace and not punishment.

So the summer came to an end, and with it her long visit. She was unhappy, and Rupert miserable at the prospect of parting; and the old ladies, with an unconscious sympathy which old virginity often shows for young love, left them almost to themselves on her last afternoon at the Abbacy.

"You will do great things, I know," she had said, "and you must sometimes let me share in the pride and pleasure of them." And he had protested, almost with tears, that there was no one else to whom he would ever owe anything, or with whom he could feel any sense of partnership; that she was his star and his sun, and his dearest and most beautiful friend; and as they stood there leaning against the harbour wall in the shadow of a cypress, he summoned up courage to put his arms about her and to ask her, in trembling tones, for a kiss. "The first and the last," he said — not knowing that a

woman's first kiss, unless it be a mere charity or kindness, need never be the last.

"No, no, no," she said softly, almost whispering, "don't let us spoil it now; be good, dear Rupert, as you always have been good to me." Very gently she disengaged his hand from her waist, but held it still in her own. He pleaded with eyes and voice; she answered a little more firmly, but still gently, "Don't you see that I haven't got it to give — that it would be wrong?"

Rupert made an impatient exclamation, hating to see himself conquered or forbidden in anything. "And yet you hold my hand, and give me yours!"

"My hands are my own," she said; and he took her cool slender hand in his, and kissed it, and held it for awhile against his hot cheek; and so they said good-bye.

. . . . . .

And when she had gone, the whole world went grey and blank to Rupert for a time. There was her first letter to look forward to, but after that there was nothing but a level of monotony in prospect; and even the letter was a secret disappointment to him, so inadequately did it echo the fervour of his own outpourings. It was more like her mouth than her eyes — a little firm and repressed; and the eyes were not visible for him to appeal to against the severe judgments of the mouth. So he was miserable, and moped about by himself for a time, absenting himself from Rathshene and society, haunting Gunn's Island with a sketch-book that he hardly

ever opened, and otherwise lamentably advertising his condition to such as had eyes to see. But in such a mood he was melancholy, gloomy, and unapproachable, and there was no one to chaff him or receive his confidences; even his Aunt Jane was frightened of him, although the old ladies had persuaded themselves that his condition was due to his frequenting the damp studio too much, and encouraged him in idleness.

And yet all the time as he wandered about, sometimes sailing far up the lough to where the lonely waters grew wide and shallow, and the monument on the inland hill showed clear and slender like a finger against the sky, sometimes crossing the bar and lazily fishing for mackerel up and down the broken waters of the channel, he was conscious within himself of a coming change, of a future hiding near at hand that would suddenly make meaning of his life, and give rein to the power he felt sleeping within him.

. . . . . .

He was first made aware of this on a day — almost the last of the blended summer and autumn that are so beautiful in Ireland — which he had devoted to sailing up the narrow, winding river that flows into the lough from the little cathedral town of Ardryan, some twelve miles away. There were only a few days in each month on which the journey was possible; the river was so narrow, and so twisted upon itself, that no wind was a fair one, and it was

necessary to sail up with the flood-tide and down with the ebb.

On this day the tide and weather were alike favourable, and with a light breeze Rupert sailed into the entrance hidden behind an island, and looking like one of the hundred land-locked bays of the lough. But as he sailed in a narrow opening appeared; in through that, and running before the wind for five minutes, and then another opening in the green hillside; past an island no bigger than a church, where a man was hoeing turnips on the sunny slope, round a corner, now port, now starboard, until he entered the narrow river itself. There was a light breeze that filled the gaff-topsail when the lower sails, sheltered by the banks, were empty of wind; the water was as still as glass except for the ripple and send of the incoming tide; and Rupert settled down to the enjoyment of this enchanted bit of salt-water navigation.

There was no sound except the ripple at the boat's stem, the creak of a spar when she leaned to a puff from over the land, or sometimes the drone and rasp of a reaping machine in the distance. Up a long straight stretch, with the wind astern, it was like flying. Then a little weedy point would show itself running out into the stream, up would go the helm, in would come the sheets, and there would be a heeling rush for perhaps three minutes; another point, and he must down helm and go about to clear it, and then for a time beat up across the narrow liquid roadway; sailing full-and-by while you counted ten,

until the bowsprit was almost touching the rocks on the stony shore, then about ship, and make a little more on the next tack, then straight across again, and so on while the adverse reach lasted.

After a couple of hours of this the *Maid of Lorne* glided beside the little sunny quay built at the point where the river became too shallow and narrow for ordinary navigation. Rupert ate his lunch and then walked the half-mile into Ardryan. The excitement of the voyage had evaporated, the streets were hot and dusty after the cool flowing water, and the noonday stagnation and depression of the little town lay heavily on his spirits. The shops were open but deserted, the streets empty and silent but for fowls that stepped about pecking there. Even they were quiet, crooning and croaking, and showing no animation except at the impulsive visitation of the cock, when there would be a sudden outcry and fluttering of feathers, subsiding quickly again into quiet croonings and croakings. There was a beggar in the market square, a drunken man lay asleep against the market house, two or three ragged children were shuffling their feet in the hot dust, and now and then a pig would pass down the street with an air of having important business as an inspector of nuisances; but nothing else seemed to be stirring. Every second shop in the street advertised the sale of porter; the few buildings in the neighbourhood of the square had an air of shabby gentility and pretentious magnificence; but beyond them the houses grew poorer and poorer, until they degen-

erated into a long line of dirty hovels. And this was Ireland! Rupert stood in the street, taking it in; even the signs of prosperity were of a petty and pathetic kind — the wretched railway station, with its four trains a day, the Orange Hall, with its advertisement of a minstrel entertainment, and the announcement of municipal contracts to be let for stone-breaking, for the supply of three wheelbarrows, for the erection of a public convenience on the quay wall.

Rupert went on to the cathedral, where he found most of the people who would otherwise have been in the streets. The eleven o'clock mass was coming to an end, and he stood for a minute by the western doorway. Living as he did amid a Protestant community in Ireland it was impossible for him to take in any but the externals of the scene; its inner meaning, the hidden golden thread it wove through the dark fabric of the people's lives, he could not know; all he saw were the outward domination, the tawdry pomp, the coarse, stupid faces of the priests, the beautiful, patient faces of some of the people.

He turned out again into the sunshine, and felt Ireland wrapping him round like a cloak. The deep green of the country beyond the town, the soft, hot air, the silence, the sun, the dirt, the sense that nothing mattered very much, and few things mattered at all, were eloquent to him at that moment of lives dreaming themselves away from hour to hour. A sudden sense of revolt took hold on him, and he

viciously kicked a loose pebble at his feet and sent it flying up the street. It landed among the somnolent fowls, and woke them to a shrill outburst of cries and headlong flutterings; but they soon settled down again in the warm comfortable dust, croaking indignantly to one another of the wrongs they suffered. And that was Ireland too!

A figure came towards him along the street — a carefully-dressed, well-bred man of middle age with a gentle face and a very red nose, whom Rupert recognized as Mr. Rafferty, the bank manager. He had been there for twenty years, and would be there till he died; his initial stock of impulse had all been spent long ago, and he was stranded for ever, poor gentleman, in the place to which it had carried him.

"How are you, Rupert? Miss Savage quite well — and Miss Jane? You've sailed up, of course. Gracious goodness, but it's hot. Come in out of the glare and rest a minute. We're very quiet here to-day."

For lack of any plan of his own, Rupert followed Mr. Rafferty into the adjoining bank; they passed through the little polished counter, where the scales lay idle, and books unwritten, to the parlour behind. It was close and stuffy, infinitely solemn, and dark and uncomfortable, with that kind of formal discomfort which is only to be found in the apartments of a joyless, elderly bachelor.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Rafferty, wiping his forehead, "I feel quite sick with heat. You're not look-

ing too well yourself, Rupert; I declare now, a little drop of something would do neither of us any harm." And he instinctively closed the door.

"I don't think I'll have any, thanks," said Rupert, who was watching the older man with the merciless curiosity of youth; "I'm not used to whisky at this time of day."

"And quite right," said Mr. Rafferty with an air of great interest. "I don't usually take anything myself at this time; but to-day, what with the heat or something, I feel the need of it. Come now — tsch, man! it'll do ye no harm — do ye all the good in the world!"

"You speak with authority," said Rupert, smiling. "All right, a little, then."

He watched the bank manager as, with an indescribable air of stealth and furtiveness, he went to a cupboard and brought out a decanter and glasses. They were his own decanter and glasses; but if they had been the crown jewels he could not have handled them more guiltily.

"This is a drop of good stuff," he said; "I get it direct from the distiller; I don't believe in any of these blended spirits." When he talked of the whisky he spoke with an almost painful seriousness, his brows knitted and his cheeks drawn up, as if the subject were almost too difficult and important to be discussed in an ordinary way. His hand shook a little as he poured out the precious golden liquid; and to Rupert there was something pathetic in the action of groping hospitality — the poor lonely man anx-

ious to share his weakness with his guest, and get a little countenance and self-respect. Like many men who drink too much, he was careful to measure the spirit in a wine-glass before he added the water. Nothing would have induced him to mix more than one wine-glassful — at a time. Then he performed the customary act of faith of the furtive whisky-tippler, who always, if possible, avoids mentioning his favourite beverage by name, but refers to it as Something, or It, or Anything of the Kind.

"I always think," he said, raising his glass to the light, "that as a rule one is better without Anything of the Kind." (Here he drank half the contents.) "But if one should require to take Something, a glass of This is as wholesome a thing as a man can take." (Here he drank the other half.) "If one is in health, one is better without It altogether." (Here he set down the glass.) "I envy you your health, Rupert."

It, and Something, and This, and Anything of the Kind having been disposed of and returned to their cupboard, Mr. Rafferty turned to Rupert with a little brightness in his drooping eye.

"And what are you thinking of doing with yourself, my boyo? Not stop at the Abbacy, I'll be bound."

"No, I don't think I shall stay at home much longer." Rupert had never before felt the determination enough to put it into words, but even as he spoke he made the resolution. "I shall be leaving quite soon — going to London, probably."

"Ah, that's the place," said Mr. Rafferty with a sigh; "there's some movement to things there. But a man might as well be dead as stuck away in a dirty hole like this."

"How long have you been at the bank, Mr. Rafferty?"

"Twenty years last May," answered the manager. "Your Aunt Jane was a fine woman then, Rupert." He looked at Rupert, and then on the floor, with a little sigh. And Rupert remembered vague references to Mr. Rafferty, and wondered if there had been any stifled romance there, and if this gloomy house were the mausoleum of some vanished hopes. And all the while his eye was ranging round the gloomy dining-room, looking at the pictures Mr. Rafferty looked at, at the glasses he drank out of, at the silver he was served with, and picturing the gaunt housekeeper who hovered over his lonely meals. The talk drifted away to the general dulness of Ardryan, and the general dulness of everything, until Rupert felt that he could stand it no longer, and got up to go.

Mr. Rafferty looked at his watch. "Three o'clock! I must be off too. There's a meeting of the Bench at the market-house." As he said the word "Bench" he seemed to swell with importance; buttoned his coat, spoke a word to his somnolent clerk, and with a hand-shake for Rupert, hurried off. Rupert watched the gentlemanly figure turn the corner of the square and realized that life could be made supportable in Ardryan by two things — Something in

a corner cupboard, and the dignities of the Bench: the Bench that tried young Andy Neligan for using obscene language, middle-aged Tom Quinn for cruelty to his donkey, and old Ann M'Guire for being drunk.

. . . . . .

He hurried away down the leafy road that led to the quay where the *Maid of Lorne* was moored, the spirit of revolt against stagnation quickened in him by the sense of depression that had culminated in Mr. Rafferty's parlour.

The external life, so pleasant and beautiful as it had seemed, so satisfying hitherto, was revealed in his present mood as a kind of death. The leaven of pain and discontent that gives life and enlargement to the world of men was working in his soul; and as he cast off the warps and stepped down on the *Maid of Lorne's* white decks, he felt that even that pretty feminine companion in so many pleasures and dangers, so many sea-wanderings and hours and years of his growing-time, belonged to this green, sunny world of death, and not to the world of life.

He felt all this very vaguely in his hot young heart, but with a dim sense of tragedy. The water eddied from the rudder as the *Maid of Lorne* paid off, with the ebb tide sliding beneath her keel and the light breeze caressing her upper canvas. She was as nearly human as a thing of timber and sails can be, and very feminine, and she leaned her white shoulder over the ripples, trying to edge up into the

wind and pretending to resist the masterly hand that was pointing her away from her sunny retreat beside the weed-grown pier. She was almost a part of Rupert, and he of her, as he sat there with an elbow crooked over the tiller and an eye cocked on the luff of the mainsail; she seemed to know as well as he when she had stood in near enough to the shore where the waters slept, green and transparent, over the stony shallows, and she would shoot round into the wind almost before his decision had been communicated to the tiller. And then, when the necessity for tacking was over, she spread her wings and flew between the narrow shores, silently and swiftly homeward.

She belonged already to the past, and not to the future. Rupert felt that there was a wrench coming, a parting between him and her and all that she stood for, and in that moment he realized how dear to him was all this quiet sheltered life, with its open-air interests, its ties of pleasant habit, its placid arrangements for mere continuance in being from day to day. The tide was running out fast now towards the lough and the sea; its rippling voice spoke intimately to him, as it often did, but to-day there seemed to be a graver tone beneath the music. The water that was hurrying down the river, past cornfields and meadows, by deeps and shallows, setting across from point to bay and from creek to midstream, would never of itself carry him out of the lough. Long before it had reached the bar the tide would have turned again, and the channel waters would come

flowing back, holding it and him imprisoned there unless there were effort made of sail or oar.

But the *Maid of Lorne* was no servant of tides. With her sails spread wing and wing she far outstripped the ebbing current, opening one point after another, entering one after another the shining reaches of the river — short and seeming to be so securely land-locked that it was like running the boat on destruction to hold her on her course. And yet one after another, appearing as if by magic in the barrier of rocks and grassy shore, the openings always came; and though here they revealed a world of peace, of golden crops and drowsing cattle, yet somewhere beyond them all, round just such another rocky point, lay the open sea.

Long afterwards he remembered that last hour of sunny, melancholy peace.

. . . . . .

The wind freshened near the mouth of the river, and as he rounded the last point and entered the broad waters of the lough, a heavy puff struck the *Maid of Lorne*, dragging her lee rail under water, and causing Rupert to look doubtfully at the big spread of fine-weather canvas that cracked and flapped viciously as he luffed up into the wind. It had been so fine and settled when he left that he had not anticipated having to touch a halliard until he got home, and so he had not brought a man with him; but there was a dark-looking bank of clouds hanging over the horizon towards home, and the wind felt as though it might increase. On the other

hand, it came very puffy, in brief squalls, any one of which might clear the weather again. Taking in sail single-handed, unless he anchored to do it, would be a troublesome operation, and in an hour he could be home. Still. . . .

He ran in under the lee of an island, and managed to get the gaff-topsail off her and stowed away, but the tide was running too strong to permit him to lie-to for the purpose of reefing the mainsail. As he came out from behind the land another squall struck him, and he saw that it would be as much as the *Maid of Lorne* could do to get home in her present trim. He meant to lower the foresail and hoist the tack of the mainsail, but the wind gave him no opportunity; as soon as he thought he could leave the helm and run forward, the water would wrinkle darkly over the weather bow, and the boat would lie down under the squall, and shoot up into it all shaking. Three miles away on the weather-beam he could see the *Hilda,* Lord Rathshene's thirty-ton ketch, under three-reefed mainsail and storm jib: that looked as if things were not going to improve.

Every time the *Maid of Lorne* heeled to a puff, the green water swirled up to her combings, and the mast and rigging creaked under the strain. The worst moments were those just after going about on a new tack. It was a dead beat home, and every time Rupert put the helm down, something seemed to move in the pit of his stomach — a sign of that excruciating interest in one's own fate that takes the place of fear in a confident nature. The *Maid of*

Lorne had an old trick, when pressed with canvas, of seeming to lie dead for a moment when she first filled on a new tack; it had caused much comment at local regattas, when Rupert, and his father before him, had won many a race by carrying the last possible stitch of sail, and holding on by their teeth when the puffs came. Now, pressed as she was, the boat exhibited this old vice alarmingly. . . . If only she were free of that foresail!

Time to go about again. Lee helm — let go jib-sheet — haul in — let draw foresail — make fast — ah, there she went again! Down came the squall, pressing like a solid weight on the sails. Rupert put the helm down, his hand and the tiller going into solid green water — but she refused to answer. Then several things happened in a very rapid succession. There was no rush of water past the rail; the waves surged dead and heavy beside the boat, and a silver-green cascade curved over the hatch combings. Rupert had suddenly a sense of loss of balance. Instinctively he pulled himself up to the weather gunwale, which was coming up against the sky; looked over, saw the white sheen of the keel showing through the water — and jumped.

There was a deafening roar of water, a taste of salt, and suddenly a complete tranquillity, which seemed to last a thousand years. Then green twilight, and a blinding emergence into clamour and commotion again. Rupert shook the water from his eyes, and saw a dozen yards away the peak of the *Maid of Lorne's* mainsail and the truck of her

mast subsiding amid a swirl of wicked-looking eddies.

There were a great many thoughts rapidly formed in the head that bobbed up and down there in the blue choppy water; but "Finish" was the only word that issued from the mouth. From the level of the water the nearest shore, four miles away, was barely visible; still, it lay to leeward; better try for it. Rupert was a good enough swimmer, although not trained to cover distances; and, having kicked off his shoes and wriggled out of his coat, he settled down to a long, steady stroke. He was determined not to look again until he knew the shore must be close at hand, and he lulled himself into a mechanical oblivion by the regular sweep of his arms.

When he was almost spent, having swam, with an occasional rest on his back, for what seemed more than an hour, and when he expected every moment to feel the stones under his feet, he looked ahead. The shore was no nearer. Then he suddenly felt very tired; his sense of tiredness overcame everything else. He would rest for a few minutes, and then go on. How delicious to let go, and lie down: that was his uppermost thought. He was dimly conscious of a pain in his chest, but nothing more. Ah, how warm and comfortable it was, after all that buffeting and striving, to be in bed again!

VII

It was to another world and another life that Rupert came back, weeks afterwards. The return to life was far more painful than the exit, and far slower; it was a long time before he felt any curiosity in his surroundings, or wanted to ask any questions. Gradually he learned that he had been very ill with pneumonia. He had been picked up by the *Hilda,* from which the capsizing of the *Maid of Lorne* had been seen; they had got him just in time, and it was hours before animation had been restored. He learned the details from his Aunt Jane, who shared the duties of the trained nurse who attended him.

His first thought was for the boat. "Tell me," he asked; "I suppose nothing more was seen of her?"

"No, dear; they say she sank in thirty fathoms, and it would be almost impossible to raise her."

There was a pause. "Never mind; let her lie there — poor *Maid;* it wasn't her fault altogether."

"Oh, Rupert, how could you run such risks! You know we never worried you or lectured you — because we trusted you — we —" The old lady put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I know, I know; dear old auntie, I wasn't a fool, but there's always a risk in a boat, and it caught me that time. Don't be cut up; why, you'd think I'd croaked altogether. Where's Aunt Lena? Why hasn't she been to see me?"

The old lady looked at him through her tears with an infinite, tragic tenderness. He noticed for the first time how tired and worn she looked. "She's — she's — oh, Rupert, she's very, very ill!"

"What?" He sat half up in bed, but had to lie back again. "What's the matter? How long has she been ill — and why —"

Then he saw that her black dress was entirely unrelieved by any of the little ornaments she usually wore; and in the same moment the old lady laid her withered cheek on the pillow beside his, and told him everything. His aunt had nursed him herself, only letting the hospital nurse attend at night; and at the height of Rupert's fever she had been taken ill herself, and died within the week. Everything — her illness, death, and funeral, which the whole of Rathshene had attended, had come and gone while he lay unconscious.

"The last thing she said," said Miss Jane through her tears, "was 'Keep this from Rupert until he is strong.' She never spoke after that, and she died the next day. We were glad to see her go . . . she suffered very much."

There was a long silence in the room. Rupert put his arm about the old lady, and gently patted her and soothed her, while he tried to learn this new

lesson — that the world no longer held her who had been a second mother to him. His thoughts went back to that last day, to the sunny, silent streets of Ardryan, to his own depression and forebodings, and determination to leave the old life behind him. He remembered, too, that heavenly skimming of the river reaches on the ebb tide, when the *Maid of Lorne* was hurrying to her death. These were some of the things that had lain waiting for them beyond those rocky points.

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As life came back to Rupert another tide that had seemed to ebb almost to dryness came pouring again through his veins. While he lay in his long chair, tired of reading or talking, his thoughts and dreams gathered more and more round the radiant, unforming personality that had dawned upon his life. Everything else seemed to be receding; there was talk of his aunt going for a time to some English watering-place, and afterwards to visit friends in England, and the doctor had suggested that Rupert ought to travel a little for change of air and scene. Since the death of Miss Savage life on the old terms seemed more and more impossible; it was really she, his second mother, who had been holding him there, and now that she was gone the way to the world lay open for him.

It was characteristic of him that he saw this way to the world lying through his heart. A door there, like the door that showed Siegmund the glory of the May night in the forest, had swung open to reveal

the wonder of ideal love, and it had not closed again. He began to see Lady Fastnet as his destiny; and, like a bird that pulls an unused nest to pieces and adapts it for herself, his busy imagination set about reconstructing the character of Lady Fastnet in accordance with his ideal. The real nature of their friendship was forgotten or ignored; it began to assume the proportions of a grand dramatic passion, in which both were cast for noble parts. As other things in his life dwindled, this new fire waxed brighter and warmer; the thought of her out in the world, waiting for him to come and rescue her and carry her off, inspired him with new life, so that the very doctor was puzzled to account for his rapid recovery.

Before his illness the poet and artist in Rupert had been subordinate to the youth, interested merely in being young and alive and growing; but in the subtle change and chemical revolution of disease the more material partner had been vanquished and overthrown, and the poet, the spiritual partner, reigned supreme. He was all impatience to rush out into the world. As soon as he was up and about he set upon his studio, rummaging out all his drawings, ruthlessly destroying what seemed to his new-born faculty of criticism unpassionate or uninspired. As though driven by some great and irresistible force he found himself tidying up his life and making arrangements for leaving it. He was like some passionately faithful and believing Christian who has been told he cannot live a week, and who sets his

affairs in order, looking not towards death, but towards life.

It was his own burning secret, this sense of departure, for although in their talks it had come to be understood between him and his aunt that as soon as he felt inclined he was to start off on his travels, there was no date fixed, and the old lady hardly realized the coming separation. He went up to the home farm, and even took an interest in the clearing of a new space for out-buildings, talking over plans and designs with the foreman, although he knew he would not be there to see the work done. And when he rode into Rathshene, and met and spoke with acquaintances there, he was unconsciously taking farewell of them. They were welcoming him back to the life of their own little world while he was saying good-bye to them and it.

And last of all, on a day that had been brightened by mellow winter sunshine, he rowed down the lough on an ebb-tide to Gunn's Island, and climbed to his favourite seat and let himself be steeped for a little in the familiar scenery and music of the tide. It was all grey and calm, the dead flat calm of a winter's afternoon, with a cold touch of melancholy in the atmosphere, and a minor cadence in all the harmonies of sea and air. He had no thought of drawing; he simply lived this hour in a curious exalted communion with the spirit of the place. The winter air seemed charged with magic to him, and the solitary island rock to be alive with some fairy presences that kept watch with him invisibly from the rough

hummocks and stones. The Priest's Mother sobbed and murmured; the Meadows spread their endless inscrutable caligraphy on the grey water, making circles and flourishes, and forming the letters of their mysterious alphabet in words of unending variety, and the tide roared itself away into the quietness of the grey sea. But through the ebb and the moment of emptiness that heralded the first returning ripple Rupert felt no ebb in his heart. There was a sun shining there that held back his spirits from effluence, and kept his sense of life at flood; and he looked his farewells without any regret at his departure from this scene of so many dreams and efforts. When he drew up his boat in the little harbour at home he felt that he was almost free.

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He and his aunt sat talking after dinner by the drawing-room fire. They were both specially conscious of their loss on these winter evenings, when the empty chair and silent voice seemed to separate rather than unite them. Rupert felt nearer than ever to the edge of the world as they spoke about simple practical things connected with the house, and money, and the doings of lawyers and bankers. Rupert would have three hundred a year, which seemed to him a large sum — large enough for all material occasions that life could ever discover. A cousin was coming the next day to keep Miss Savage company, and to go away with her to England. . . . Rupert suddenly felt conscious of an acute longing to vanish from this scene without further farewells;

the sight of the drooping old figure in the chair opposite grew intolerably pathetic, and intolerably remote from him. From henceforth she would live with ghosts and memories; she was dedicated to the grave, and he was dedicated to life. Oh, he must go, he must go; now, that very night, that was the time to go. But where? . . .

"Listen, Rupert, here is something that will interest you." The old lady began to read from the newspaper an account of a court function in Dublin, and then, from the lists of names and dresses supplied by the enterprising dressmakers —

"Countess of Fastnet. Dress of soft grey satin embroidered with steel paillettes; train of cloth of silver; ornaments, emeralds and diamonds. — I'm sure she looked charming in that; you ought to have been there to see her. I remember your mother wore grey satin at the last drawing-room she was at; but it was grey satin with old needle-point lace, and she wore pearls. She was very much admired, I remember. . . ."

Rupert was not listening. A picture had risen before him, and a flood of emotional romantic enlightenment entered his mind. He would go to her now — at once — find her out where she was; that was the obvious necessary thing to be done. Gradually a feeling of indignation began to come over him against the old lady for not going to bed the moment he had silently realized his decision; she stood in the way of it, all unconscious as she was. She put down the paper and sat placidly knitting while Ru-

pert, on the other side of the fire, fretted with a new impatience. Her face was gravely intent on the stitches threaded on the long white needle, and her mind for the moment was rummaging in lavender-scented chests among old faded silk dresses.

Rupert got up suddenly, stretched himself rather ostentatiously, and said, "Well, isn't it somebody's bedtime?"

She looked up smilingly. "Are you sleepy, dear? Don't wait up if you are; thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five — I think I must finish this row — thirty-six, thirty-seven, thirty-eight. . . ."

He sat down again. "No, I was only thinking of you; I shan't go to bed yet." He spoke briefly, fearful of starting a subject of conversation that would delay his aunt, watching jealously the fleecy chain of stitches that slowly lengthened along the needle. Presently she laid it down, and he moved impatiently.

"Talking of that reminds me," she said, unconscious of his hurry, and following her own mild thoughts, "of one night when there was a dance at Ballyculter, and your mother and I were going. Our dresses hadn't come, and we were in such despair! She was to have worn white, and I pale blue — "

"Yes? How nice you must have looked! I suppose you turned all the young men's heads that night."

"Well, dear, I was telling you — seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven; — her dress was to have been

white and mine pale blue; they were coming from Dublin, and we sent to the last train to meet them. It was a wet night, and the mare shied turning the corner into Ardquin, and broke the shafts and harness to pieces; that was when Nolan got his arm hurt — or *was* it that time, now, or before that? I think it must have been before, he came — "

"I say," said Rupert; "excuse me interrupting you, but I think the lamp's going out." He jumped up and went to it, turning the wick a little without her seeing. "Shall I ring to have it refilled, or is it worth while?" He almost held his breath, so much seemed to hang on her reply.

"No; never mind, dear, I'm ready to go to bed now." She began to make her deliberate preparations, unwilling to leave the warmth of the fireside, folding her work neatly away, her shapely old hands touching the fleecy wool as with a light caress. Rupert strode up and down the room; once as she paused, he paused also, and with hands clenched and his whole body rigid with ridiculous suspense he apostrophized her silently behind her back, forming the words with teeth and lips but making no sound — "*Oh, go on, go on!*"

But when at last she turned to him to say good night his impatience vanished, and he saw her as she was — old and lonely, and about to be forsaken by him. How could he do it? He didn't know; all he knew was that it was to be done. A mighty steel point seemed to have begun to cleave through the world before him, through affections, habits, laws,

decencies even, and he must follow close behind it.

It was with an unusual tenderness that he kissed her good-night and when he had done so, turned to her again and took her in his arms and kissed both cheeks. It was his farewell, although she did not know it, and she responded gratefully and softly to the unspoken love and tender gratitude. "Good-night, Rupert dear." She was gone.

The moment she was in her room Rupert went out and crossed the causeway to the stable building. He had some difficulty in rousing Nolan, the old coachman, who had gone to bed. But at length his head appeared at the window.

"Look here, Nolan, I want you to be ready with the car to-morrow morning at five o'clock to catch the first train. We can do it in three hours, can't we?"

"And why wouldn't we, Master Rupert, your honour? But sure 'tis early —"

"Never mind that. Remember, five o'clock, and come quietly to the house so as not to wake any one."

"So I will, sir," the head disappeared, but continued to mutter to itself about "the queer notion, that, to be slippin' up to the house the way not to be waking any person!"

Rupert returned with swift steps, went to his bedroom, opened drawers and cupboards, and began to pack. He was wonderfully methodical in spite of his haste. In two roomy suit-cases he stowed

enough to furnish him for a few weeks; two other trunks he packed also, and left them strapped and ready; all his other belongings he arranged so that they could be sent to him at a moment's notice. His drawings had already been packed in a case, but he did not propose to take them with him; he had only a few sketch-books and a portfolio containing some of his best work — notably "The King's Daughter."

He went about his task quietly but with swift, decisive movements, sometimes pausing with knitted brows to think, or remember something, or make a written note of the contents of some box or other; and once or twice he paused and looked through the uncurtained window into the violet oblong of the night sky, his face transfigured with a grave and yet intense joy. And then he would resume his quick, sure movements of preparation. He was not as a rule either orderly or methodical, but to-night he forgot nothing. There were no difficulties; what would at any ordinary time have seemed like muddle and confusion fell into order almost miraculously; he felt the steel point cleaving the way before him, cutting a sharp and well-defined path through the jungle of details. It was long after midnight when he had finished packing, and then he returned to the drawing-room, and sat down at the bureau to write a message for his aunt. First he made some notes about the few affairs of the place that were in his charge, seeing that everything was clear and in order. He even balanced the cellar-book, which had been his father's pride, and which he had piously attended

to ever since his seventeenth birthday, writing on a large slip of paper inside the cover —

"Note: Willis & Co. to send to recork the Madeira, bin 17, sometime this month. R. S."

as though he had been the elderly, methodical father of a family instead of an infatuated poet of two-and-twenty.

He sat with knitted brows for a moment looking at the slip after he had written it, as though he were trying to understand what it was about. Then he took a sheet of notepaper, and in his delicate but mature hand wrote without any pause or hesitation —

"DEAREST AUNTIE, — I shall have started before you are awake, because I couldn't bear to say good-bye. I have left everything quite straight, I think, and when I want any more of my things Andy can send them to me if you aren't at home. I shall go to Dublin first, and shall probably stay at Rimmon's or the Shelbourne; but in any case letters and things can be sent to Mr. McCann, as, even if I go anywhere at short notice, I will keep him posted with my address, and you must do the same. Cousin Helen will be with you a few hours after you get this, and then you won't feel lonely. Of course I will write from Dublin, and wherever I am.

"Your ever loving

"RUPERT."

He left the letter in a conspicuous place where the housemaid would find it in the morning, and then with one last look round, turned out the lamp and went to his bedroom. He was not sleepy or tired, but by sheer power of will he forced himself to go to bed and sleep for three hours, in order to rise fresh and strong for the wonder and joy that lay hidden for him beyond the dawn. As he laid his head on the pillow and closed his eyes, the vision in his mind lay clear before him — the meeting between him and her, the end and solution of everything. Not one second beyond that meeting did he look. It was the ark, the alighting point on which his soul would rest at the end of its first long flight. He and she! He saw her in the terms of that terse accidental description of the dressmaker: a shimmer of grey, all glorious without and within. His artist's eye distinguished the stiff folds of the cloth of silver and the soft folds of the satin, and the glow of emeralds and diamonds in the pale gold hair; it was thus that he pictured her in the hour of meeting. He thought of his coming to her on wings of fire and love, and of the thrill that the whole universe would receive when their eyes met. What she would say or do formed no part of his dream; it was he who was coming, he who was to do and to say. She stood waiting for him — in soft grey satin and cloth of silver.

His three hours' sleep robbed him of nothing. He awoke at four o'clock with his impulse undiminished and his vision undimmed. Though his body had

rested, his young soul had been flying on through the night, and when he awoke it took up his body again and bore it on strong wings towards the goal. So young was he, so ardent, so exalted, so romantic that he never paused or wavered or doubted anything, but went straight on behind the point of steel that was making this new path through the world for him. Through the long cold drive in the dark of the morning beside puzzled, sleepy Nolan, through the discomforts of a slow railway journey — through all that day of prolonged impulse his poet's store of unreasonable, romantic certainty never failed him. Every step of that day was taken on the path of raying beams that led from the sunrise of the heart, and brought him in mid afternoon to the door of a house in Merrion Square.

VIII

Lady Fastnet sat in the faded, pompous drawing-room of her house in Dublin. Her husband, a sallow, loosely built man of about forty, with a long, narrow face and dark, hollow eyes set rather close together was sprawling in an arm-chair with a Catholic newspaper in his hands. Between them sat a priest, Father Byrne, a florid, bulky, masterful but kindly-looking object in sleek black clothes with a sleek shining hat deposited between his feet. He had called to beg on behalf of the Archconfraternity of St. Joseph, and incidentally to bask a little in an aristocratic atmosphere, and had become engaged in a rather feeble discussion with Lord Fastnet on sodalities in general.

"But see here now, Father, I'm for the discipline of the young laity as much as any man; but what I say is, are the children to absorb the sodalities, or are the sodalities to absorb the children?"

"Well, indeed, and that's a very pertinent question; but if your lordship had been in my parish room last week when we held our festival of the Precious Blood, I think you'd have had your eyes opened. Eleven hundred children enrolled, not only as junior members of the Precious Blood, but as full

members — full members, mind you — of the Sodality of the Redeemer! That's what the Church is doing for young Ireland."

"Do you hear that, Geraldine?" said Lord Fastnet, turning to his wife; "if we could get more of that down at Castle Fastnet the country would be in a better state."

Her ladyship turned smiling eyes on the priest, "I'm afraid our old Father James is too old-fashioned for his lordship; but he's the kindest man that ever had charge of a parish, and I won't hear any treason against him. The children all adore him."

The priest laughed, "Sure it would never do if we were all alike, my lady. But we must have airly discipline if the Church is to keep tight hold of the young men and women."

"Yes," resumed Lord Fastnet tediously, turning to his wife; "and what I say is, would Father James be any worse or less kind a man if he made the children's souls a little safer instead of leaving them to run wild? Some things are all very well, but — "

A maid appeared at the door. "Mr. Rupert Savage, my lady."

A breath of newer and more vital air, like a wind blowing from some happy land of youth, seemed to enter the room with the gallant, debonair figure that came forward across the faded carpet. He stood for perhaps a couple of seconds in the middle of the room, looking very handsome, in the spot to which his long impulse had carried him. The point

of steel had cloven the way for him precisely thus far and no farther, basely deserting him in the presence of the lady, her husband, and a priest.

The men got up, and Geraldine half rose from her chair with an expression of mingled surprise and pleasure. "Why, Rupert, this is a nice surprise. When did you arrive? Edward, you have heard me speak of Mr. Savage? — my husband — Father Byrne. Come and sit here and tell me where you have dropped from."

Lord Fastnet shook hands, the priest bowed, and Rupert sat down beside Geraldine with a rather blushing face. Even now he had no sense of anti-climax, he knew he must have just a little more patience until they were alone, and it was easy to endure in her presence. There was a little general conversation, enough to reveal that Rupert and the two other men had nothing to say to one another. Presently Lord Fastnet and Father Byrne went out together; Rupert accepted their departure as a submission to his own masterful necessity, and realized that his moment had come.

He brought a chair and placed it so that he sat close to Geraldine and facing her. His boyish diffidence was a thing of the past; he spoke quietly, firmly, with conviction.

"Lady Fastnet," he began quietly, "a great many things have happened to me since I saw you. I've realized that what you said was true. I believe I *am* going to be great, but I won't be great except for you and through you. I've come to you."

She looked a little surprisedly at him, but there was pleasure in her surprise. He did not notice the surprise, but he saw the pleasure, for which his soul was thirsting. "Oh, Rupert," she said, smiling at him, "how glad I am! But how shall I deserve it?"

"You deserve everything. There is nothing that I can do — any one in the world can do — that you don't deserve. You deserve it because you are good and brave and true-hearted, because you are the most beautiful thing in the world, and only the best of anything is worth offering to you."

The steady fire in his eyes — not the fire of elementary passion so much as the burning light of conviction and intense purpose — sent a qualm of warning over her. Still she held on to the pleasure his words gave her, answering tremulously, "Am I really all that?"

"Yes, yes, all that, more than that. Listen: I think you heard — I've been very ill. Something happened — snapped in me — while I was ill. All the unimportant things fell away. Life has a reason; I know it now. Do you know what that reason is? You — you are the reason of my life. You first told me I might be great; I am going to be great, and you are going to be glad and proud of me!"

He took her two hands in his; gravely but very earnestly he looked into her face with eyes shining steadily to meet hers.

"I love you, love you, love you, and you must love me and believe in me!"

At his first word her eyes fell from his. She withdrew her hands and sat looking down for a minute in silence.

He waited.

"Rupert, listen to me. I do believe in you; I do look for great things from you. I am glad you will do them for me — in a sense. And always I will be your friend."

A sensation of chill, the dreadest thing he had ever felt, crept into his heart. It was very faint, very subtle; he did not understand it, he only felt that there was danger and death in it. But he was of high mettle, drew himself together, and grew more collected in presence of the danger.

"Of course, of course," he said, speaking even more slowly and quietly than before, "I know, I am sure of that — my friend always. But you are much more than that." The calm in his voice broke, and a storm of passionate feeling rolled up, deepening his tones, making his body tremble, veiling his eyes in sudden mist. "Love, I must have your love! You have all mine — all my thoughts, all my life!"

Geraldine stopped him with a gesture. "You must not talk of love; I can't give you my love. I am married, and all the love I have to give belongs to my husband."

Her words seemed even to herself unreal and insufficient at the moment — one of those difficult,

crucial moments when even the things we mean do not ring quite true. And she was thoroughly in earnest, although she had no better words. Rupert saw, not her earnestness, but her dispassionate and collected air. The storm-clouds broke and swept over him in a passion of feeling.

"Oh, I know, I know. I don't want the love you give your husband. You and he are one thing, but you and I are another. You found me out when I wasn't even aware that I existed — there would have been nothing of me, but for you. Don't you see; can't you see — I mean, that when two people understand like that, it *is* love? I know it, every hour of the day and night. I don't expect that other love," he went on desperately, not noticing her hand laid restrainingly on his arm, refusing to read the mingled fear and trouble in her face, and seeing only that she was trying not to listen to him with her inner ear. "I don't expect it." He smiled bravely. "You can't love *me* like that; I'm not like you, wonderful and lovable; but oh, darling, such as I am, all that I will ever be, you made! And when — "

As she felt the rising strength of his passion, and found in herself nothing able to oppose it, she remembered her religion. The look that came into her eyes then, so alien, so friendless to his appeal, stopped him dead in the midst of it. She seemed to Rupert like a stranger, so different from the warm smiling reality of the lady of his dreams, that he felt as though he had been appealing to an indifferent

portrait or statue of her, and that she herself was somewhere far away.

Nor was the chilled voice in which she now spoke the voice of his beloved.

"'All that you will be,' you say. You will be a great man, but you can only found greatness on beautiful and pure things. What you are saying is wrong and wicked. *I* did not make you, Rupert; you speak as though there were nothing in the world but human power and human laws. But the laws of God are above human laws. Oh, I know you are a Protestant, and don't understand how real these things are to us. But they are true."

Rupert was silent, looking no longer at her, but beyond her. She went on talking, relieved at the successful effect of the moral cold douche, and anxious to give Rupert time to recover. Everything she said was sweet and kind and pure and good and safe and sensible and prudent and gentle and definite, and almost entirely quoted from a higher authority; but he hardly heard what she said. He was saying dumbly to himself, "Oh, for yesterday, for yesterday!" He was so ashamed and humiliated that he did not say the "forgive me" which Geraldine expected.

And when she finished her homily with a grasp of his hand, and "Now, Rupert dear, you must go," he simply turned and went away without even a good-bye.

. . . . . .

He was walking blindly along in the glare of

Sackville Street, when he heard a voice behind him saying, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." Something familiar in the clear drawling tones arrested him, and he turned to look at the speaker — a young man with brown hair and a smiling, clean-shaven face.

"Why, Tommy Blake?" he said.

"I'm right after all, it seems. The hair was the hair of Rupert, but the walk was Methuselah's own, so I tried my voice on you. Where did you drop from? And where are you going, may one ask? To an execution, or only to a funeral?"

Rupert's wave of curiosity in recognizing an old schoolfellow had passed the moment it was satisfied, and his one desire was to be alone again.

"I'm awfully sorry, I'm hurrying off to see some one; can't stop now. Let's meet to-morrow."

The wide eyes of Mr. Blake searched his face calmly. "Are you shamming, now, or only drunk? If you think I'm going to leave you until I've found that out, you're very much mistaken, my boy. Dining out, are you? Well I'm not, so I'll come with you. Very busy, is it? Well I've nothing to do, so you won't be hindering me."

"No; I wasn't dining out, after all," said Rupert.

"Of course you weren't, but I am — I'm dining with you at the Shelbourne. We're going in the wrong direction; that's better. Don't say you haven't asked me — it isn't necessary."

Rupert had still some power to resist, but he had

no power to repel or turn away this friendly creature who merely insisted on fastening on to him. The clear eyes of Tommy Blake, indeed, saw that there was something obviously amiss, and native instinct showed him the only way to be of use. He was a year older than Rupert, and took a romantic view of the duties of friendship. He was reading for the bar, and writing for posterity, he said; and certainly there was no great demand for his poems among his contemporaries.

He rattled and prattled away to Rupert, ignoring his silence, ordering dinner with decision and eating it with appetite. Rupert drank wine and ate nothing; the alcohol seemed to have no effect upon him except to steady his shaking nerves. Blake did all the talking, but he found out that Rupert had been spending his time in drawing, and after dinner he made him produce his portfolio.

"By Jove," he said, as he turned over some of the later drawings, "I know a man who'd go mad over this! Look here." He pulled out his watch. "It's past nine. Do you know Edmund Heath?" mentioning a famous novelist of the realistic school. "No; all the better; he won't dislike you so much. We'll go there and meet Greer and one or two other men who are sure to be interested, and you'll like them. Come along; it's only talk and tobacco and whisky. Be miserable and grumpy just like you are now, and you'll have no end of a success with the Celtic gang. We'll take these things with us."

. . . . . .

Rupert was in a dream; a small part of his consciousness governed his speech and actions, submitting with foolish easiness to the leadership of Tommy Blake; the rest inhabited a world of shadows amid brushing wings of memory whose every touch was a mortification. And yet it was agony to be brought back to consciousness and the necessity for speech, and relief to sink back into the semi-oblivion of misery, in which Blake's voice dwindled away to a far-away whisper, and a curtain of blindness and forgetfulness hid the outside world from him. He awoke from one of these intervals to find himself standing in a room filled with a blue cloud of tobacco smoke in which floated a dozen strange faces. He heard himself replying to the languid words of welcome uttered by Heath — a sad, middle-aged man with a suave distinguished manner. His long face was soft like a child's, and a grey moustache drooped over his mouth. A few names, some familiar to Rupert and some unknown, were pronounced with his own, and he found himself trying to distinguish the owners of them from among the group of faces, some pale, some shaggy, some cavernous and wasted-looking, that hung in the haze of smoke; but he could not identify them, and having become detached from Blake sat down in a place vacant near Heath.

"You are just in time," said the melancholy realist. "O'Donnell is going to read us a poem about a seal." His voice had an expressive range of tones which he accompanied by a waving emphasis of the

hands; and he articulated unimportant prepositions and articles with the distinctness of a foreigner. "I do not know," he continued, his voice descending the scale, "*why* any one should write a poem about a seal; to *draw* a seal — yes; but a seal either *is* a poem already or it is nothing at all. I am sure you agree with me?" He turned to Rupert.

"Yes," said Rupert, taking up the vein, "of course. But probably the poem is really more important than any number of living seals; in that case, what does it matter?"

"Oh, *well,*" said Heath, "there is always that point of view. Perhaps, when we have heard the poem — " he shrugged his shoulders. No one minded him, least of all O'Donnell, who listened to the melodious nonsense he talked for the occasional fountain of wisdom that welled up in the midst of it.

Presently the poet began to read in a dreamy monotonous voice, "The Seal of Inishvhan." He sat crumpled up in his chair, his dark eyes glowing in his pale thin face beneath a tangle of dark hair. Every one, Rupert no less than the others, fell immediately under the spell of the voice. Edmund Heath had forced his face into an expression of polite, vacant boredom and endurance, and it was strange to see his attempts to suppress the interest that the poem roused, and the very gradual change of expression from vacuity to beaming appreciation.

O'Donnell read on, like a wizard weaving a charm. The dreamy tones, the music of the richly assonant words, the freshness and remoteness of the

ideas that conjured up a faëry world seen dimly through a veil of sea-spray sank into Rupert's soul. The golden poetry flowed like a healing balm over his wounded consciousness, and quickened the artist to masterful assertion. He was conscious of a great impulse to do something, once and for all, that would recover him from his humiliation of soul. In something tremendous he had failed, or the world had failed him; in something tremendous he could still conquer. He knew it; he no longer heard the words of the poem, but only the music of the voice, now falling into long penultimate cadences. A scene in the legend had composed itself as a picture in his mind — the drowned woman's hair streaming and straying over the water, and the line of seals heading out to the open sea. The voice came to an end, and the chorus of comment broke out. One shaggy Celt was in tears; every one was affected more or less deeply in his own way, and was giving expression to his feelings when Rupert said bluntly, addressing no one in particular:

"I could draw that."

There was an immediate silence; some of them were inclined to regard the remark of the well-dressed, good-looking youth as mere folly or impertinence; but there was something in his tones and in his face that spoke directly to the intelligence of that unusually intelligent and sympathetic group. Rupert's head was thrown back a little, and his ruddy hair had fallen away from his forehead, revealing its breadth and the new lines of concentra-

tion in it, and adding significance to the strength of the finely modelled face and square chin. O'Donnell looked up at him with a glint of understanding in his dark eyes, but Heath was the first to speak.

"My friend," he said, "you are a genius. O'Donnell's poem was a great thing, a beautiful thing, but that remark of yours is a greater thing still. It is splendid, it is wonderful; we have all said something about the poem, but you have said the *only* thing. There is *nothing* more to be said. It is like the lifting of the brush off a Corot; any one can lay his brush on a canvas, but only a master can lift it off."

When Heath talked like this he had the art of making his hearer believe that what he said was the merest common-sense. Rupert had never been talked to like that before, and he liked it, and thought Heath a great man — as indeed he was, but not because of what he said. O'Donnell had come across to Rupert, and some of the other men were gathered round him, urging him to draw something then and there if the mood was really upon him; and Blake, immensely pleased with the success of his friend, was rummaging about in Heath's desk for a sheet of card-board.

"Of course he will go and spoil it all by drawing something," said Heath. "To say 'I can draw that' was wonderful, but to go and do it is like marrying a woman you have fallen in love with. It is impossible to prolong a moment."

But Rupert was in the hands of the younger men, and of his own impulse; and presently he was es-

tablished in a lamplit corner by himself, working rapidly, almost feverishly, and yet with a perfect facility and certainty that he had never known before. The voices of the other men fell away from his consciousness, or sounded only like a far-away murmur. He did not know that they had divided into two groups — a few men gathered round Heath, who affected to be no more interested in Rupert now that he was actually drawing, and who was holding forth about Bach's fugues, which he did not understand; and a larger group scanning the bundle of Rupert's drawings that Blake, with the forethought of a wise showman, had brought with him.

Greer, the art critic, who had held rather aloof from Rupert himself, was deeply interested in the work in the portfolio. He laughed to himself with pleasure, and frowned as the puzzle of Rupert's talent baffled and eluded him. "It's so beastly good," he said to another man, "but it's all wrong — there's only a small thing that's wrong, but it runs through everything."

"Too literary," said the other man.

"Oh, of course; but that's nothing. Just look, I ask you, at the line of that coat; fancy making a dress-coat say all those unutterable things! Is it all in the line?"

"His brain keeps getting in the way," said the other man; "if only he'd left that alone, and cut out all this chattering work in the foreground — but how good!"

Greer turned to Blake. "This is a big thing,

Tommy. Where does he come from at all? And why has he never learned to draw? And how in the world does he know without learning? For though he has obviously never learned, he can teach us all a good deal about drawing. And what bad breaks he makes! look what a howler he has come over this."

"Remember, he's lived alone since he left school — has a place somewhere in the North. I don't suppose he has any one to show his work to, or ever sees much other work. Wouldn't that account for it?"

"Yes, perhaps it would. It makes it all the more remarkable though. Fancy digging all these wonders out of his own imagination. My God!" Greer's face grew solemn; "think what he'll be when he's *seen* things. At present he thinks there are only three things in the world — drawing, the sea, and some woman. Just think when he finds out that there is *painting*."

"I wonder," said O'Donnell, "will it not spoil his purity of vision? Does a man who sees lines like those want to be bothered with colour? Won't it only confuse him? All he wants is paper and pencil and the wide world."

"Yes, the wide world," said Greer, smiling; and they returned to a discussion of the drawings in detail.

. . . . . .

It was less than an hour after he had begun to work when Rupert got up and joined the others.

"I'm thirsty," he said; "will some one give me a drink, please?"

"Finished?" asked Greer.

"Yes," said Rupert, "there it is. It's a good thing. I owe it to you, O'Donnell; take it, please."

He handed over the drawing, and every one in the room gathered round to look at it.

"It is very nice," said Heath, with a compromise between his two manners. "Naturally, a man who could say that could draw it — still, one should leave some things unsaid. No one can *really* say a thing if he thinks it."

Rupert stood awkwardly for a moment looking at the group bent over his work. The excitement of doing it had evaporated; the weight of lead hung round his heart again. Then he said brusquely, "I'm going. Good-night." And he turned to the door.

There was a murmur of remonstrance, and Tommy Blake jumped up. "No, Tommy, please; I won't disturb you."

"But what about your drawings?"

"Oh, keep them — burn them; do anything you like with them! Good-night." The door shut behind him, and the outer street door had also shut before the company had recovered from the surprise of his abrupt adieu.

"Queer fellow," said Greer, turning to the drawing; "but look at this; it is pure genius from the first line to the last; it is right where all the others are wrong. We've made a discovery to-night.

You're right, Heath; he's a genius. The world will be talking about him in a year."

"And doesn't he know it, too?" said a little fair man, a journalist. "Did you hear the way he said, 'this is a good thing'?"

"That's where he's great," said Greer; "he knows."

"He certainly has his feet on some road or other," said another man; "but I wonder what road?"

"Does it matter?" asked Heath sadly with a slow wave of his hand. "Whatever road he's on, he will get to the end of it and spoil it all."

O'Donnell shook his head, looking deep into the fire. "The roads are the only things that are endless," he said.

BOOK II

I

The shadows lengthened to the golden close of a London summer's day, and still the artist stood working at his table by the window, and still the model, whom he had hardly glanced at twice in the last half-hour, posed over the big mirror on the floor, looking into an imaginary pool. At last, with his head turned over his shoulder, he uttered the welcome words, "That will do; run away and dress;" and while the anæmic young woman relaxed her tired limbs and disappeared into the ante-room he busied himself with a few finishing touches.

A man-servant came in and silently began to tidy the room, lifting the great sheet of glass to its place against the wall, folding up and putting away the two or three pieces of old brocade that had been hung over chairs. Rupert looked critically into his finished work, altered the length of a line, looked again, added about fifty dots of infinite smallness to an elaborate tracery, and then put down his pen, throwing out his arms and straightening his back from its stooping posture.

He was still the same Rupert of five years ago, and yet not the same. Without losing its slimness his frame seemed to have become more closely knit.

The ruddy hair lay as thick as ever over the broad brow, but it was more carefully groomed. The eyes were still merry and clear in their greyness, but the mouth, if it still held the suggestion of sadness, was a little firmer, and the line of the jaw stronger and fuller. He was carefully, even fastidiously dressed, and his firm hands, no longer the hands of a yachtsman, but of an artist, were scrupulously cared for. In these respects his body might have been the body of an athletic dandy, if it had not been dominated by the powerful personality of the head — the head of a master.

He turned to the man. "You can get the room ready, Hicks — twelve for dinner. You'd better open half-a-dozen bottles of the Léoville, and have a few more in case they are wanted."

"Very good, sir. What about flowers — did you order any, sir?"

"I forgot all about them. I'll go out now and get them myself — and have my bath ready when I come in, will you? And pay the model if she hasn't gone."

He ran downstairs, took his hat and stick, and stepped out into the street. It was characteristic of him that when he came to London he had settled in St. James's rather than in Chelsea or Hampstead; and his flat, at the top of an old house wedged between that of an Ambassador and an official of the Royal household, looked out across the green park and towards the dusty sunset skies of Pimlico.

A few steps brought him into St. James's Street,

and he walked rapidly up the broad thoroughfare, now beginning to show signs of preparation for sociability after its day of reserve. He turned into a Piccadilly florist's, and there bought a great bunch of deep crimson roses which he carried back in his hand — an agreeable spot of colour moving down the solemn greyness of St. James's Street.

When he returned the long table was already laid in his beautiful room, whose still grey walls were receding into the dark, leaving the table, which he himself adorned with its glowing load of roses, isolated in the centre of the room, like an altar prepared for sacrifice. And it was the old Rupert of the Abbacy who glanced carefully over the table and sideboard to see that nothing had been forgotten and that no lack of care on his part should mar his hospitality. Then he went to dress.

. . . . . .

It was no chance collection of acquaintances that gathered round Rupert Savage's table that night, but a group of artists and men of letters who had achieved what was, for the moment, practically a monopoly of the arts. They were diverse in their genius, divided and dissentient sometimes among themselves; but to the London of the day they offered a solid front of brilliant and aggressive talent. By their literature, their drawings and paintings founded on literature, their criticism, their plays, their affectations even — for every clique has its affectations — they dominated London, interested Paris and Munich, and set America by the ears.

There was a kind of joyous sense of greatness and mastery among them that made them great and masterful; they went their own way, secure in the approbation and backing of each other, and by no means unwilling to carry their tendencies to extremes *pour épater le bourgeois*. They met at one another's houses, admired and criticized one another's work, had their feuds and jealousies among themselves, but loyally upheld each other's reputation before the world. They represented a reaction against the neglect of manner which characterized English art in the day before theirs, and their own success was virtually the triumph of manner over matter.

The twelve who were met round the table to-night by no means represented the whole of this group, but they were its chief spirits. The secret of their influence lay in a blend of personality and craftsmanship, and a genuine knowledge of and belief in themselves. "Greatness" was a word continually on their lips: "I am great, you are great, we are great," they cried; and not unnaturally the world completed the conjugation by saying, "They are great."

The two leaders of the movement, if movement that could be called which rested so securely on the assumption of its own rightness, were Rupert Savage and Cyril Midwood. It was Rupert's sudden success two years ago that had given new life to the work of the other men, and strengthened their power and influence. In the small intelligent world which

cares for such things there was something like a *furore* over his strange, imaginative, and exquisitely beautiful drawings. They became the rage; his personality completed his success, which had been almost instantaneous, and in two years brought him money, fame, position, adulation — almost everything that youth can dream of. It was thus that he almost displaced Midwood, the former leader of the group who had been one of the first to recognize Rupert's genius, and whose own work, which in literature had something of the fantastic delicacy of Rupert's in drawing, had for some years been recognized as the real soul and spirit of the neo-erotic movement.

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He sat near Rupert now, and in great physical contrast with him. He was at least ten years older; he was thin and stooping, with dark melancholy eyes, and a cadaverous and not altogether attractive face. "Red roses and red wine," he was saying; "you always match your flowers with the colour of your wine, Rupert; how wise and right that is! But you are always wise and always right," he added, raising his glass with a little melancholy bow.

Greer, the critic, whom Rupert had met in Dublin five years before, grumbled in his beard, "You fellows will be matching your food with the colour of your eyes next," he said.

"We will hope not, Greer, for the sake of your eyes," said Bowen, a little keen-faced man with big spectacles whose chalk drawings of East-end school

children had been the sensation of last season. His weakness was his wit, which was always leading him to say things which no one quite understood, but which every one laughed at.

"It is merely a question of style," said Winstanley, the dramatist; "if a man has that sense, he can't help showing it in everything he does. It would be impossible for Midwood to use an unrelated participle or a split infinitive — not because it would be wrong — but because it would be disagreeable. It would hurt him. But it wouldn't hurt Jeyne there," nodding at a shaggy giant sitting beside Bowen, "because he's that horrible thing, a Socialist, and because he hasn't got that particular sense. Rupert sees a harmony between wine and flowers — and for ever afterwards it would be painful to him to violate that delicate harmony by introducing a quarrel in colour. Style is so much more important than you think, Greer."

"I sometimes wonder if it isn't a little less important than *you* think," said Greer.

"It is everything," said Midwood; "there is nothing without it but chaos and ugliness. The naked world is a horrible place; its ideas are horrible, unless you clothe them in a beautiful garment of manner, and a ritual of style; just as a naked woman is an abominably ugly object, and has to be disguised in beautiful trailing fabrics and remodelled into long flowing lines by her clothes."

The talk strayed along thus from one topic to another, with that perfect license and freedom from

the fear of being wrong that marks the conversation of the successful. And just because every one felt that nothing he could think or say could be unimportant or uninteresting, the talk was interesting in its own hour and place. When they thus talked together, these men felt inches taller; their meetings were a wellspring of that adorable vanity that haunts the artist's mind and fills the world with beautiful things; each man went forth from them, like a lover from the arms of his beloved, with his sense of greatness renewed and his sense of rightness deepened.

They represented many arts, and covered among them a great range of craftsmanship. There was Marston the novelist, who imported the clarity and vivacity and realism of French fiction into a body of brave and penetrating intellect; there was Sibley, the real heir of the first Impressionists, who painted in the true happy spirit of beauty, and whose pictures were therefore being bought cheaply by the wise Jews, who stored them in cellars until their hour should come. Sibley looked anything between twenty and fifty; he was fair and kind and tired. He devoted his life to work, and talked like a libertine. There was Cadman, who was almost always drunk, always gentle and egotistical, and whose enamel work was the most wonderful thing of its kind in Europe; there was Jeyne, the clever Socialist and intellectual revolutionary; and there was Charlie Reid, the most lovable man in London, who devoted his life as a journalist to the praise of the group he worshipped.

There were two others, guests, not really subjects, of Rupert's kingdom, but like all intelligent men of the day, deeply interested in it and glad to meet its great men. One was Gaston St. Paul, a French composer and a man of powerful intellectual individuality who had been conducting a concert of his works in London, and who had been enthusiastically welcomed by the Twelve as one of themselves. The other was Caird, a middle-aged Scotsman who was grimly ensconced somewhere in the British Museum, where he nourished an infinite scorn of the men and institutions about him, but who liked Rupert. These two listened more than they talked — the Frenchman alert, absorbed, missing nothing, and occasionally contributing a flash of lightning; the Scot attentive, grim and suspicious, occasionally emitting a growl of thunder.

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As they sat amid the smoke-wreaths they talked about themselves, about their work, about their place and influence in the world — a tendency of conversation which seemed to puzzle Gaston St. Paul very much.

"But" — opening his hands and shrugging his shoulders — "you *are,* you exist, you have arrived, you people, you make the plays and the books and the pictures of your country; and yet you talk about what people think of you!"

"It matters in England," said Marston; "the public will do anything rather than support really good work; they have to be bullied into it. It has

to be made the fashion. In France you patronize your public; here we have to fight them — and in a way we're all fighting them — even Savage here, or Midwood. Half the people who buy their work don't really like it; but they know it's the right thing."

"Of all the desperate means ever taken to ignore the true issue of work in this universe," said Caird slowly, his Scotch accent more pronounced than usual by reason of his emotion, "I think that is the most wrongheaded and desperate. Make your work the fashion! Fashion with whom, pray? Fashionable where? In the lewd monkey-house ye call society? I wonder at ye, Mr. Marston."

"How wonderful!" said Cyril Midwood, turning to Caird. "How delicious to hear that Puritan note booming through our fribble of vanities. The sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal! I forget the passage," he went on, passing his hand over his brow, "but I am sure it is full of colour and meaning — everything in the Bible is. Go on, chastise us more!"

Caird laughed. "Not when you kiss the rod; I'm not harsh enough for that."

Gaston St. Paul turned to Rupert. "It is amazing," he said, "how you are all allowed to be successful in England. You don't deserve it; you are too intolerant; you are like children playing a game. But can it last? You admit it does not rest on the merits of your work — the people do not understand its merits! They wonder at you, but they do not

know you! Their mouths are open, but their eyes are shut."

"Their purses are open," said Jeyne.

"For the moment," replied St. Paul; "but, I ask you, how long? No, no, no; you are buoyed up by the upturned faces of the public. You are all too rich, too successful."

"That's a matter, my dear Monsieur, that will very soon adjust itself," said Caird. "The wide ocean of realities is ebbing and flowing beneath them. Wait till your friends with the upturned faces get a crick in their necks, and then — souse! What a bath-day there'll be!"

"Charming, charming," murmured Cyril Midwood.

Caird regarded him with a long, penetrating look, and shook his head. The talk drifted to other things, and presently some one spoke of the drawing Rupert had just finished.

"What is it?" asked Reid.

"Susannah and the Elders," Rupert answered, with a twinkle in his eye.

Greer looked up sharply, and even the mild, indulgent, clever Sibley pursed his lips. "My dear Rupert! An Academy picture, done with your pen? You would never condescend to that?"

"Oh, one never knows," said Rupert, rising and putting his arm through Sibley's. "Come and see."

He took a couple of candles over to a corner of the room, and pinned the drawing up on a board, while the other guests gathered round. Rupert fell

back, and had a flashing consciousness of keen enjoyment of the scene. This group of the cleverest men in London — the men whose work he most admired — grouped round *his* work in expectation of critical enjoyment; their faces, clever, strong, full of character and individuality, seemed like a noble background to his life and work.

It was a small drawing, done with the combination of flowing mysterious lines, infinitely delicate pattern work, and broad contrasts of pure black and pure white for which Rupert Savage's work was famous. But it was no academician's conception of the subject. A pool of water, with the shimmering reflection of a woman's face and form, and round it a group of gnarled, twisted elder-trees, instinct with sinister expression in every knot and branch and outline, sapless, shrunken, and withered with the first blasts of winter; aged, tortured, grotesque, and yet agonizingly concentrated on the pool and its image. . . .

Greer was the first to speak. "Wit!" he said, turning away with a frown. "What the devil did you want to be witty for?" And he turned quickly back. "But for that — yes, in spite of that — how good!"

"I like it," said Sibley, and walked away to the table to get another cigarette; and his words meant more to Rupert than the more elaborate appreciation of the others.

Cadman, who was drunk, but critical even in his cups, went to the table, returned with a handful of

roses, and tried to put them on Rupert's head. "Best thing — you've done," he pronounced very slowly and distinctly. They all began to discuss it from their several points of view. Marston and Jeyne and Winstanley gloried in the conceit almost more than in the drawing. Gaston St. Paul laughed loud and long, partly in pure pleasure at the masterly work, partly at what he regarded as the light-hearted cynicism of the conception. "It is not serious," he said; "you are laughing at the public, and they will find you out, my friend!"

"It is rather a practical joke, isn't it?" said Reid; "but it is jolly good for them. They expect a grave, sensual, Puritan sermon on that theme — and they get this! It is great."

Cyril Midwood, who had been silent so far, laid his hand on Rupert's arm. "My dear boy, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Instead of those dreary old men, who were only made mischievous by the heat of the day, you have discovered something really delightful and wicked! The wickedness of old men on a hot afternoon is vulgar and disgusting; but the wickedness of old trees in winter — how delightful, how fresh, how great, how true!"

In any other man it would have been fulsome nonsense; but the gravity and enthusiasm of Midwood, the concentration of his cadaverous face, the curious charm in his rather husky tones, carried conviction even where it was resisted. Rupert was unfeignedly pleased with the reception of his work.

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Caird remained after the other guests had gone. He was a man who went very little into society, but whose company was valued highly by the few on whom he bestowed it. Rugged speaker of truths as he was, he had the shyness that often goes with a character like his, and he was generally an almost silent member of any company in which he found himself. He had met Rupert at the house of an old friend, Lady Waynefleete, and had liked him at once; partly, perhaps, because he was so different from the man Caird had imagined from knowledge of his work alone. And Rupert, with that questing interest in things outside and unlike himself that was a great resource of strength in him, had at once recognized that the mind of Caird was no ordinary mind, and the man himself no ordinary man. He had impulsively asked Caird to come and meet his friends to-night, and Caird had as impulsively accepted — partly out of curiosity, partly from the wish to know more of Rupert, partly from a haunting sense of the pathetic that the famous and successful young artist had awakened in him.

They sat smoking for a while in silence by the open window, looking out into the dusk of the short summer night, luminous with lamps and stars.

"There was a man asking me about you at the Museum to-day," said Caird presently; "a man Blake, who was sent over by the Irish Board of Works. He seemed a harum-scarum sort of a fellow. He had some tale about your walking out of

Edmund Heath's house one night and disappearing, and turning up three years afterwards — famous. I hope ye did no such thing."

Rupert smiled, and then looked grave. "Shall I tell you how it happened; how I come to be sitting here to-night talking to you?"

"A piece of human history would be a fine thing after all this fal-lallerie. Go on; now just tell me the plain facts if they're to be told."

Rupert put down his pipe on the window-sill. "Five years ago — a lifetime ago, when I was a boy and didn't know anything I nearly died for love of a woman. I was simple enough to tell her so, and she reminded me that she was married, and a Roman Catholic, and a lot of other things that didn't seem to me to have anything to do with it. I thought the end of the world had come, and when I was wandering about waiting for it, I stumbled on Blake, and he dragged me in to Heath's where there were a lot of the Irish gang — O'Donnell's lot, you know. Greer was there, and they saw some of my work. O'Donnell read a poem, and I sat down and drew 'The White Seal of Inishvhan' — you know what I mean. They began talking, and drove me mad, and I went away. I cared about nothing except escaping, and took a steamer to Liverpool, where I found myself next morning. I telegraphed for my things and for money, and found a Booth liner just going to sail for Portugal and South America. I took a ticket for as far as she went, which was Para. I didn't know where or what Para was. I'd never

been farther from home than London. Does this bore you?"

"Go on," said Caird.

"It was all new to me. As soon as we were out of sight of land the sort of paralysis that had been over me left me. There were some interesting people on the boat; the captain was a friendly old boy. I love ships and the sea. I found I couldn't help making love to one or two pretty people on board — in short, I began to get better. There was one, especially, a girl of about six-and-twenty who had been a widow for five years, and was travelling with her mother — at least, that's what she told me. I used to sit for hours in a deck-chair beside her, making fun of the other people. I was careless and bitter — you know what I mean — and I suppose it made me seem older than I was. But every now and then I'd remember; and then I wouldn't speak to this girl for perhaps two days, but sat and moped by myself, or walked about the deck scowling. Of course I didn't know it at the time, but no doubt it made me more interesting to all these idle people."

He paused and looked up into the spangled sky. "I remember when we were in harbour at Leixoes, and nearly every one had gone to see Oporto, I went ashore by myself and sat on the beach watching the waves breaking on that yellow, yellow shore. I had never seen colours like the red and white of the buildings, the blue of the sea, the yellow of the sands! Stevenson once said that the most beautiful thing he had ever seen was a ship sailing off the coast

of Flanders. Well, far and away the most beautiful thing I have ever seen is a wave breaking on the coast of Portugal. Those great purple waves, bursting into snow and thunder! They nearly broke my heart. . . ."

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"Go on," said Caird.

"Oh, about the girl?" said Rupert, coming back from a dream. "It's soon told. We went on to Para, and when I saw the yellow river and the swamps of course I realized that there was nothing to do but come back again. I'd been neglecting her, ashamed of myself in a way, and in a way wanting her — you will understand; and then one night, when we were at Madeira — she was leaving the boat there — she came into my cabin. She cried, and said I was being cruel to her, and she didn't care for anything, and she knew we would never see each other again, and she made me feel thrilled and unhappy, and she kissed me over and over again, and — well, do you see, I happened never to have been in that situation before. I was terribly ashamed of my innocence, and so to hide it I met her half-way. I needn't go into details. It was a clear case of seduction; but when she had gone I believed honestly that it was I who was the seducer, who had taken advantage of a helpless girl. I was miserable — hated her and myself — wondered if I ought to marry her, and a lot more wild nonsense. Fortunately I never saw her again. Have some more whisky."

"Well, here's to the Tree of Knowledge," said Caird, sipping at his glass, "and the queer fowl that lodge in its branches! Go on, man Savage."

"I stuck to the *Alphege* and waited for her to go back to Lisbon, where I landed. It had been blind chance that had taken me to that steamer and not to some Atlantic liner that would have dumped me in New York, where God knows what would have happened to me in that mood of taking everything that turned up, good or bad! I can't be too grateful to the *Alphege*. She took me out of winter into those warm summer seas, she gave me the life of the sea instead of an hotel, she showed me strange new countries and cities, she gave me human society, and she landed me back at the door of Spain, in the world of sun and colour, instead of a world of warehouses!"

Caird grew impatient. "Is this an advertisement of the steamship line, or is it the story of your life? Man, keep to facts."

Rupert laughed. "I'm sorry — those are facts too, because I felt them. Well, I stayed in Lisbon for a time, and then went on to Spain. You can imagine what it was to me, all alone, living from day to day, going where the wind blew me, to find myself in Spain. I fell in love with Spanish life and with the country — that combination of mad, sunburned gaiety and the sombreness and gravity of those great rolling landscapes. I went all over the country, from Fuenterrabia to Cadiz and from Valladolid to Valencia, and at last I drifted to

Granada, and couldn't tear myself away for a year, staying even through the heat. I drew and drew and drew; all those old palaces, the Moorish gardens of the Generaliffe, the pavements, the fabrics — they were the whole of life to me. I lived in Madrid for six months, and in Seville for three, and for a year at Toledo, where I nearly died of typhoid. I lived on Spanish painting, from El Greco to Zuloaga. I used to surfeit myself with pictures and buildings, and then go out into the desert to pray — to draw, I mean. There's a little bridge over the river in the middle of the plain between Eciji and Lucena, a hundred miles west of Granada; there's a solitary inn there, very dirty; and I used to go there to dream and work. It's all like a dream now, but it taught my hand and eye their trade."

"And what about yourself all that time; never mind your hand and eye; what were you doing?"

"Growing," said Rupert simply.

Caird put out his hand. "Well said, well done," and he grasped Rupert's. "Solitude and work — no better school for those who can stand it — for I take the solitude for granted."

"Oh yes, I was quite alone. . . . There were intervals, of course, in Madrid and Seville; the Tree of Knowledge bore a little more fruit — wild and bitter-tasting in the end, but my heart kept clear of it this time, and I don't think I took any harm. Perhaps good."

"Nothing that a man does of his own choice does him any harm, provided he sees all round it, and

knows if it is good or bad. It is the knowing that matters, not the doing. And the end?"

"The end came one day when I was sitting in the sun at Valladolid, opening the English mail. My aunt and the lawyer were the only people I heard from, but they sent me papers and things. I was turning over the *Weekly Review* when I saw my own name — and there was an article about *me,* myself, and some of my work which was being exhibited! I couldn't make out who had got hold of it, until I remembered that I had left my things that night at Heath's and told Tommy Blake he could do what he liked with them. He and Greer had sent them in to the Modern Artist's show — and people talked about them. The article was by Cramer; it was nearly all about my work, and said it was the biggest thing that had happened since I don't know what. The other papers talked too, and the whole thing gave me a hunger for my own land. I knew the work I had done in Spain was miles better than that early stuff, and that if what half they said was true, I was all right. So I packed up and went straight home for a week, and then to London — and you know the rest. The show of Spanish things was a ridiculous success, as it seems I have been ever since. That's all the story."

"Not all, my friend," said Caird, looking out through the window. The night was gone, and the pearly reflection of dawn floated in the western sky. "Success like yours is never the end of any man's story, if he is worth his salt. Yon Frenchman was

right — you're too successful, too high up. You're like Zacchæus, who climbed up into a tree to see the man from Nazareth, and just had to get down again for his pains. You'll hear it soon enough: 'Come down, Zacchæus!'"

"But how am I to come down?" asked Rupert laughing, as Caird rose to go.

"That'll be managed for you," said the Scot grimly. "The tree'll come down, if you don't, and you'll just be on your two legs again. Mind you don't lose the use of them in the meantime. Good-night."

II

The Charles Steinmans (it used to be Karl, but that was altered at the time of the marriage) had a very definite position in London society. They were very rich, and Steinman was supposed to have played up patriotically, and also done well for himself, on two separate occasions: first, when at the age of thirty-five he married Lady Angela Byrne under circumstances that furnished a great deal of interesting gossip at the time, and second, when he bought and presented to the nation the famous Murillo that was on the point of going to America. Patriotism (for his adopted country) and painting were his two passions; the hours he spent in a small office in Watling Street seemed to represent an unimportant part of his life, although in fact they furnished the means for his more embellished existence. It goes without saying that his house in Hill Street was a museum and picture gallery combined, that he had a good cook, and that the people whom Lady Angela invited to her parties were of sufficient importance in the world to make little Steinman feel that he was a "force," and that his son and heir, from whose Saxon features all trace of Semitic ori-

gin had been mysteriously eliminated, would have something more than pictures and money to inherit.

Among Steinman's pet hobbies was the proprietorship and editorship of *The Riddle,* the monthly magazine devoted to the work of Cyril Midwood, Rupert Savage, and the brilliant group that surrounded them. On the Sunday following Rupert's party he went to lunch with the Steinmans in order to hear some proposal which Steinman had to lay before him; and although he went as a matter of course, he did not hope for much amusement. He respected Steinman's knowledge of art matters and enthusiasm for them, but he rather laughed at him in other ways — he was so very English, even for a Jew.

Midwood would be there too; and as Rupert walked along Piccadilly, very carefully dressed and with a carnation in his button-hole, he wondered, not for the first time, if he really liked Midwood. Rupert had accepted him unquestioningly, as he had accepted the whole artistic situation when he came to London; he himself had fallen so naturally into place beside Midwood as the keystone of the whole thing, that he never dreamed of doubting that the foundations were planted deep in the reality of things. And yet he had never taken to Midwood as he had to Sibley and Bowen and Cadman, and some of the others. They were all craftsmen, artists to the back bone; he was not so sure about Midwood. His work was undeniably beautiful — a filigree of words, patterned, shot with colour, encrusted with

gems of sound and sense; morbid of course, but then Rupert did not in the least mind that. If Midwood's perversity made his work more interesting, the clean-living Rupert would have been the last to blame him; it was art for art's sake, art before anything. In their revolt against the beauty of the obvious, the beauty degraded by the enjoyment of the multitude, he and his friends preferred to make their search for the beauty that lay hidden in ugly or despised things. The time had come for a forcible abduction of art from the overpowering embraces of morality; it was one of the chief missions of Rupert's group; art was to be set free by them from her long imprisonment in the ogre's castle, and carried off to share their free Pagan life of forest and shore. And in this cutting-out expedition Cyril Midwood was the acknowledged leader; while the others merely ignored conventional morality in their work, he openly flouted and insulted it both in his work and life; and of them all, he was the chief one to draw the fire of the ogre's guns.

Rupert, walking across Berkeley Square, decided that he did not like Midwood. To tell the truth, he did not always read his poems; their still, sultry atmosphere was unmoved save for an occasional breath of passion that came and went in the rhythm, scentless and hot like the desert breeze that idly swings the silken curtains of a tent; and Rupert in his heart remained a lover of the western horizon, that fresh sea-wilderness in which the sun seeks his rest, rather than of the burning Eastern line out of

which he rises. It was all a little foreign to him, and he could never bring himself to real intimacy with Midwood. No, he did not like him.

Groups of people dotted the pavement, returning from the Sunday parade in the park. Elderly women, expensively and strikingly dressed, suffering discomfort from the unwonted exercise of walking, offended his sight. Evidence of extreme wealth always offended his Irish soul; it was almost the only point on which he differed from his friends, who accepted pride and luxury and arrogance as among the splendid things of life. "We must have all these things, because we are great." Rupert Savage, with more money than he wanted to spend and dressed in the extreme of fashion, passed contemptuously by the denizens of Berkeley Square limping home to lunch. "Rich Philistines," he said to himself.

Just then he saw Cyril Midwood coming down the other side of the square on his way to Hill Street. In spite of his reflections of the moment before, Rupert had a sense of relief, of pleasure at the sight of the stooping, dandified, and yet distinguished figure coming towards him. This was no Philistine at any rate, but one of his own world. And when Midwood greeted him affectionately and impressively, Rupert decided that he did like him.

"Ah, my dear Rupert, always young, always handsome, always the master of the world! give me your arm, and we will do a work of charity, and let these old vulgarians write down one golden fact

in their tedious lives: that they saw us walk up Hill Street together one summer Sunday in this year of grace!"

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There was no one else at the Steinmans' except Steinman's younger brother Friedrich, lately arrived from Hamburg, and nobly trying to be an Englishman like Charles, in spite of difficulty with the language. Lady Angela's tired face brightened up in the society of Rupert and Midwood who, one on each side of her, played a pretty and elaborate game of rivalry for her smiles.

But half-way through lunch Steinman, who thought that enough time had been spent in pleasant frivolity, interrupted with his favourite phrase:

"Well now, suppose we come to the point."

"How very tiresome of you, Steinman," said Cyril Midwood. "You are always coming to the point, and losing your illusions, and, what is worse, robbing me of mine."

Steinman smiled indulgently; he knew that it was the proper thing to admire everything Midwood said, but he was tenacious, and began to dominate the conversation. Rupert had to listen to the commercial appraisement of his own talents and those of his friends by the owner of *The Riddle;* and as Steinman paid him £1200 a year for a dozen drawings, it was no more than decent to listen politely. The talk turned to Midwood's recent visit to Syria, and he fascinated them with an account of things he had seen or imagined there, waving his long hands

and chanting vivid phrases with his husky voice, until they all fell under the spell, and only the brothers occasionally broke away from it to exchange significant glances.

When Lady Angela had retired the younger Steinman, who had been keeping rather in the background of things, and did not always answer to his new name of Freddy, came and sat beside Midwood.

"You talk wonderful," he said, waving his little short arms in a grotesque imitation of Cyril; "you haf the gifts — I raise my glass to you!"

There was honest enthusiasm in Freddy's beady eyes, and Midwood could never resist making a convert. His enemies said that he had an eye to the main chance, and cared less that people should understand him than that they should be rich enough to be of use to him, but it was not true. He had the instinct to fascinate, to conquer, and he took the same trouble with the worthy as with the unworthy. Often his methods were those of mere gross flattery, but his manner carried them off.

He filled a glass of wine. "I see that you are one of those who feel, who understand. You must be one of us. Rupert, we have found a new adherent to the cause of beauty and art. Fill your glass and let us drink to him. This is a great moment — the moment of friendship!" They drank to the flattered and embarrassed Freddy. "Golden wine, golden wine," went on Midwood in his chanting voice; "it is the proper libation. Drink, my friend; drain your glass while this moment lasts!"

To Freddy it was a new and not wholly disagreeable idea, this raising of drinking to the level of a solemn rite. Basking in the sunshine of Midwood's favour, he drank some more, until his diffidence was gone.

"Now," said his brother, "Freddy has a proposal to make to you two. I should say that Freddy is going to settle in London and go in for publishing very elaborate and beautiful books, on art chiefly. Some in colour, you know, by that new Metz process — limited editions, ten guineas a copy — that sort of thing."

"Splendid, splendid," murmured Midwood; "we will guide him in the right path — eh, Rupert?"

"Rather," said Rupert. "It's an excellent idea, and bound to succeed if it's properly done, and you get the right men's work for it."

"Well, that's the whole point," said Steinman. "Now Freddy's idea is — he asked me to put it before you, but he might just as well do it himself — to get you two men to do a book together. You told me, I think, Midwood, that you had written some poems about Syria, isn't it? Well, why not write some more? Call them 'Syrian Songs,' and get Savage to do a dozen or twenty drawings to illustrate them. The printing and reproductions would have to be quite perfect, and you could get such a price for a limited edition that would enable you to make it one of the most beautiful books that has ever been produced. Isn't that it, Freddy?"

"That's right," said Freddy.

"Syrian Songs," said Midwood to himself; "Steinman, I begin to think you are a poet! the title is admirable. What do you think, Rupert? Or rather what do you see? The merchant's tents, the colour and embroidery, sword-blades, scimitars, the tents of love in the desert, the pilgrims, the nomads, the mosques! What do you hear? The wind on the desert, the wash of the Dead Sea waves, the jingle of the caravan, the muezzin's call to prayer, the love-songs of shepherd boys on the slopes of Lebanon! Oh, you must do it, we must do it!"

Rupert was stirred by the voice, the words, the music and colour of the names and the pictures they called up. He saw it at once as a masterpiece, a thing after his own heart, and, characteristically, he did not inquire more or hesitate a moment.

"Yes, yes, that is a thing to do, Cyril — we'll do that, and make a great thing of it — we and Steinman," remembering Freddy and turning to him with a smile. "We must drink again — 'Syrian Songs'!"

They drank the toast with enthusiasm, and there was a little more talk, in which the elder Steinman raised the question as to whether the public would be sufficiently interested in Palestine.

"Syria, Syria," said Midwood — "that is quite a different thing. Palestine means the Holy Land, and Bible maps, and all sorts of dull things; our Syria is a land of love and colour and strange passions and melancholy sins!"

"Dhat's right; dhat's the note!" said Freddy,

who as he drank more wine, increased in veneration for Midwood, and also began to lisp: "Melancholy thinth — very goot! Eh, what? You play up to dhat, Mr. Thavage, and we'll have a thucceth, ithn't it?"

"Shut up, Freddy," said Charles; "you can leave the contents of the book quite safely in the hands of our friends. Come and see those etchings," he added to Rupert, who was rather disgusted by Freddy's outburst, and willingly followed his host.

"He's all right," said Steinman, "only he doesn't quite know the ropes yet. He's a very clever man, that brother of mine; they think a lot of him on the Continent. He's full of this idea; it will be a big thing. Now, then, what do you think of these?"

In the dining-room, with a glass of wine before him and a big cigar in his mouth, Freddy sat in a corner listening to the jewelled words of Midwood, and displaying more and more the half-drunk submission that was his most eloquent tribute to Midwood's personality.

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Rupert went on by himself to Queen's Hall, where he was in time to hear more than half of the programme. Music was one of the many new pleasures that his life in London made possible for him; he liked sitting alone among those vast audiences watching the eloquent rise and fall of the fiddle-bows and submitting himself to the sorcery of Strauss or the mastery of Beethoven. This afternoon the music was of a gentler, more intimate character, and Men-

delssohn's "Midsummer Night's Dream" overture came like a refreshing shower after the rather oppressive hours at Steinman's.

Pachmann was playing, moreover, and Rupert seldom lost a chance of listening to and looking at that half-simian, half-angelic sorcerer. The concerto was Schumann's in A-minor, and at the opening succession of tense chords Rupert sat straight up in his chair, experiencing one of his premonitions, aware that somehow or other this music would have a special significance for him. He listened carefully to the cool, plaintive theme given out by the woodwind, and watched the soloist as, with his tongue in his cheek, his shoulders shrugged, and the face of one who violates a confidence, he took up the same theme and let it float away from under his fingers in milky chords. Then Rupert shut his eyes and felt himself borne away on the tide of music — that flood of darker sound that rises from the tenor depths of the strings and eddies sombrely about the heart. As the stream of sounds flowed on and the tragic loveliness of the following themes established itself, the music evolved a personality of its own, feminine, wistful, incomplete. Schumann and Pachmann and the hundred frock-coated musicians who were blowing and fingering and bowing up there in a summer storm of harmony all vanished from Rupert's thought; it was a woman's voice, deep and tearless, that spoke from the music, a woman's eyes that watched through a veil of misty remoteness for some answering look from him. If ever music was fem-

inine, this music was — so beautiful in form, so exquisite in all its appointments, so borne along and buoyed up on a pretty commotion of colour and sound like that which women are asked to make in the world, and with which the long-drawn notes of the soul, those true themes of their lives, must be made to harmonize.

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Pachmann, playing sublimely, his hands dancing over the keys with fingers of iron and velvet, ripped a great tangle of harmonies from the very bowels of his instrument, gave A-minor a pat like the pat of a kitten's paw, and lifted his hands from the keys with the air of a nasty little boy who has been caught playing a dirty trick. Fortunately Rupert was not looking at him; his soul went on with the orchestra as it took up the themes again and brought the great song of woman's life and love to an end.

He went out and walked up and down in the corridor until it was time for Pachmann to play again; he was excited by the music, in love with it; he wanted to hear nothing this afternoon but that feminine voice, cool and intimate, of the piano speaking under a master's hand. The remaining solo music was all Chopin — Chopin played as only Pachmann can play it. This time Rupert looked as well as listened, and watched those twin performances — the performance of the fingers and the soul, and the Punch-like performance of the droll that attends upon them, nodding and becking and grimacing, and trying to make the audience laugh when the fingers

would make them weep. Rupert loved this Jekyll and Hyde performance, though it did not make him laugh — it was too uncanny for that. Pachmann was a little like one of his own drawings, he thought; and as the A-flat impromptu rippled out through the hall and the harmonies faded and dissolved in the long cadences, he made a little conceit about Pachmann — an angel's soul imprisoned in the body of a monkey, and allowed to have control of nothing except the fingers. What shames and agonies the angel must endure when he builds a temple which the monkey defiles! what bitterness of soul when, having made an enchanted lake of sounds, he finds that the Ape has turned it into a Dead Sea and summoned his fellows to keep a Sabbath by its shores.

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Rupert hesitated as he turned out into the sunshine of Regent Street. He was greeted by many acquaintances at the door, and more than one fair face and friendly voice flattered him with an invitation to share the afternoon drive and intimate hour of tea; but he evaded this hospitality. He was still stirred by the music of Schumann and Chopin; he had a longing for feminine society, but not, somehow, for the society of any of the languid, beautiful women whose white hands he sometimes kissed and whose selfish eyes invited him to the game of drawing-room dalliance. He was not in love with any one, and he had steered fairly clear of the sumptuous flirtation that good-looking and successful men

of his type find so fatally easy in London; all the same he wanted to be with some friendly woman.

He thought of Lady Waynefleete, and wondered if she was in town. He would go and see — she was the very person with whom to spend a quiet hour and forget about the Steinmans. He walked through the Sunday streets to Bryanston Square, where Lady Waynefleete had one of those roomy and beautiful old houses that still keep a little pride and ancient dignity within reach of the Marble Arch. Yes, her ladyship was at home.

She was sitting in the long cool drawing-room, and looked up smiling as Rupert was announced. She was a great friend of his. Although she was hardly fifty, and had been a widow for ten years, she had the position and influence of the great lady of a former generation. Before her marriage she had been a maid of honour, and after it one of the most famous and exclusive hostesses of her day; she had been the recipient of more dangerous confidences than any woman in London, and an unconscious influence behind more than one famous life. She was plain and not very well dressed, and she had won the right, by sheer quality and singleness of character, to do what she liked, go where she liked, see whom she liked. She was a sterling friend, but she never condescended to be any one's enemy.

"I was just thinking about you, and wondering when you were coming to see me, or whether you were getting too famous. Well, there seems to be no end to your success. I felt quite ashamed, out

of sheer sympathy, when I read that article in the *Deux Mondes.*"

"That was nice of you — what a lot of nonsense there is in it all! But — I don't mind telling *you* — I can't help liking it."

"Why, of course you like it — so would anybody. You will never fall into that vulgar mistake of despising the good opinion of your contemporaries."

"Well — all that side of things is very unimportant, especially when I am talking to you. My head is full of music this afternoon — Schumann's Pianoforte concerto, and played by Pachmann! It wakens an old vice of mine — I want to draw undrawable things — the first movement for example."

"Be careful! You sail quite near enough to literature, without patronizing music as well. Surely you can let the other arts speak for themselves."

"Yes, I suppose one must," said Rupert with a sigh; "but there's a great temptation to play with them all. By the way, I've never thanked you enough for introducing me to Caird. I felt rather scared of him at first, after all you said; but afterwards it was quite another matter. I like him so much; he's an extraordinarily interesting man. He came to my weekly dinner the other night, and stayed a long time afterwards."

"What did he talk about?"

"Now that I think of it, I don't believe he said much; he made me talk to him, and tell him all about Spain, and myself."

Lady Waynefleete laughed. "Vanity! No wonder you thought him interesting. But I am glad you liked each other — he wouldn't have come if he hadn't liked you."

"I don't know what he thought of us. Cadman was — well, in his usual condition, I'm afraid; and Midwood was very Midwoodish, and he rather pitched into us."

"And a very good thing, too; I daresay you needed it. You know I don't pretend to be a critic, but I sometimes wonder if it is really necessary for good literature to be quite so unwholesome as some of Mr. Midwood's poems? Yes? Oh, I know you are laughing at me; I don't know Mr. Midwood, and I don't think I want to, but I *don't* like his work."

"Oh, but you mustn't say that," said Rupert on the defensive at once, and all the more because he felt guilty of having felt as Lady Waynefleete felt. "His work is wonderful. It is too beautifully done not to be wholesome — though, after all, there are other things to eat besides porridge, even though they're not as wholesome — truffles, and caviare, and peaches for example."

"I am probably quite wrong," said Lady Waynefleete, shaking her head, "and in your heart you think me dreadfully dull and frumpish for saying that; oh, yes you do; but still — well, there it is. I shall ask Mr. Caird if he agrees with me."

Rupert was about to reply when the footman opened the door and announced "Mrs. Graeme, my

lady." As he stood up a tall, graceful woman came across the room to Lady Waynefleete.

"Celia, my dear! How charming," said Lady Waynefleete, taking both her hands. "Yes, sit here. Do you know Mr. Rupert Savage? — Mrs. Graeme. How nice of you to come. Mr. Savage and I were just going to quarrel."

"I *am* some use in the world, then! I was beginning to think I was none. I have been trying to be nice to some, oh, my dear, *such* dull people at luncheon, and only succeeded in being stupid and boring them. Colonel Wurling asked me what my favourite text was, and I could think of nothing, and shouldn't have known what to say if Mr. Savage hadn't come to my aid."

"I?" said Rupert, puzzled and attracted.

"Yes — I looked helplessly round the room and caught sight of your drawing — 'Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love'; so I said that! He looked rather shocked, and passed me the Madeira; and then we began to talk about you."

"Now this is *very* interesting," said Lady Waynefleete, leaning forward. "Tell me what he said."

"No, tell us what *you* said; I am sure it was both kinder and more interesting," said Rupert. He wanted to hear her voice again, which was low and reedy and reminded him somehow of the Schumann concerto. She was evidently about his own age; her profile, which was towards him, was very pure in its lovely outline, and there was an effect of still-

ness about her that made an atmosphere of dignity and repose wherever she was. She sat up very straight and still, without any movement except of her shining violet eyes and animated, clear-cut mouth.

"I was bound to say nice things about you, or rather about your work, when you had given me my text, and especially as the Colonel doesn't approve of you. I had to hear a lecture about decadence, and morbid perversion of talent, and the corrupting influence of art unless it had a moral purpose, and other dreadful things, to any extent. It seems he had been to the 'Modern Artists,' and come away with the firm conviction that you and Sibley and Bowen and Cadman and Cyril Midwood, whose poems he had been reading, represented a 'corrupt and retrograde influence' — his very words!"

"My poor child," said Lady Waynefleete, "how very overwhelming for you to have to defend them all in a bunch."

"I didn't — I only stood up for Mr. Savage and Mr. Bowen, and basely deserted the others. He said afterwards, 'he was glad we were in agreement on *some* things,' and I felt a wretched hypocrite."

Rupert found a new pleasure in listening to her voice, quite irrespective of what she said, and in watching her long eyes for the moment when they should turn towards him. He was quite content to sit silent while she and Lady Waynefleete talked. Pretty women, and the adornments of pretty women, always attracted him; but the attraction of Mrs.

Graeme was unlike that of the other women he knew. It was less human than artistic; he felt as he felt when he was looking at a portrait by an old master; he would have liked to sit quietly in his chair and do nothing but watch her. He was sorry when the time came for him to say good-bye.

"So *that* is the famous Rupert Savage!" said Mrs. Graeme when he had gone. "What a boy he looks; I thought he was much older."

"Six or seven-and-twenty, I should think," said Lady Waynefleete. "I like him extremely; he takes his success so well — it hasn't spoiled him a bit. I don't like that set particularly — one hears dreadful things about Cyril Midwood and some of the others; probably quite untrue. But Rupert Savage is a gentleman as well as an artist, and I confess to liking him all the better for it."

"He is very quiet," said her friend.

Lady Waynefleete laughed. "He generally rattles on fast enough, I assure you. I expect, my dear, he was looking at you — it is his business to appreciate beautiful things. I hope you'll be nice to him and see something of him; men like him are always rather at the mercy of the women they know, don't you think?"

III

Rupert was soon deep in preparations for the drawings for "Syrian Songs." One of the secrets of his success was his thoroughness, and he more than made up for the defects of his early education as an artist by the patient assiduity with which he studied any subject on which he was engaged. The original snare in his talent had been that he was able to produce all his material from his imagination; where knowledge failed him he invented, and although the invention was often striking and always interesting, it had stamped his earlier work as the work of an amateur. But his years in Spain, where he had found that the wealth of ornament and design in the world's treasures of art was far richer than anything his bare invention could contrive, taught him the artist's joy of rediscovering and adapting for his own use the treasure of beautiful and happy things that had come from the golden age of the arts, with the result that his work gradually became linked more closely with that mysterious succession of abiding things that make the spirit of art independent of time or place. His conceptions remained as fantastic, as fresh, as extravagant as ever, but his craft itself became deeper and more

significant, and his mastery of line more and more established as he saw more clearly into its evolution through the centuries.

He spent long days in South Kensington, in the British Museum, in the Wallace Collection, in all the places where beautiful things were conserved, with an eye always alert for line and ornament. For one little drawing, the frontispiece to Marston's novel, "The White Terrace," he had visited the Copenhagen Museum, the Museo Poldi-Perroli at Milan, the Sant' Angelo collection at Naples, the Cabinet des Medailles at Paris, and the Rudolphinum at Prague; and in that way he supplied, as he went along, what was missing in his equipment as an artist. He never yielded to the temptation to stray into bypaths of paint or other media in which he knew he could never be a master, but kept to his own tools and his own craft, until he made them practically his own; thus he had soon plenty of imitators, but no rivals.

In this also he was different from some other members of his group. In most of them there was a little lack of solidity. Their cleverness was beyond a doubt; they worshipped cleverness and dexterity, and threw them like a wonderful mantle over faults of vision and even of technique, just as they often diverted attention from the matter of their work by its elaboration and distinction of manner. But they were rather inclined to despise the work that needed to be done slowly or painfully, and Rupert so far deferred to this view that he pretended that his own

work was done more easily than was the case, and his hours of study and laborious concentration were spent alone. In company he was always careless and high-spirited, and encouraged the idea that his work was done, so to speak, with a wave of his hand.

The only one of them who made no pretence of doing things easily was Sibley, who toiled at his masterpieces in a dingy studio in North London from the first light of morning until the afternoon began to redden. He was a man who very seldom talked about his own work, or indeed any one else's; he preferred to gossip about women; and Rupert had very early been attracted by this man of strange contradictions — his sunny, irresponsible disposition, his austere devotion of his life to labour, his talk of pleasure as if it were the only thing worth pursuing; and his slow persistent establishment of a great *post mortem* reputation. He dined out every evening and flirted with some woman or other, and chattered agreeably about the stupidity of work of any kind; like most of the group, he was sought after because he was "charming," not because he was great. Very few people in England took any interest in his pictures, which they found ugly, but they willingly accepted his reputation at second-hand.

Rupert had gone to Sibley's studio one day, as he knew that the painter had some fine Persian silks which he wanted to look at. He was sitting in a low diffused light, a half-gnawed crust of German bread beside him, retouching a sombre, passionate

little study of blue shadows in starlight — two lovers kissing beneath the archway of an Italian house. Rupert paused to wonder at the emotional power shown in the painting of the woman; there were both passion and tenderness in that dim figure with its arms stretched up to the man's shoulders, and the head thrown back to receive his kiss.

"When I look at a thing like this," said Rupert sighing, "I understand how all the work of our day will seem to people a hundred years hence. This is the work that lives."

"What is much more important," said Sibley, biting at his black bread, "it is the work that enables me to live. Much more important. Too many pictures live, unfortunately. If this will live until I have sold it, that will be quite long enough. You don't mean to say *you* have started that scare about immortality?"

"Oh, I sha'n't have any," said Rupert; "I get too well paid now. But do you mean to tell me you don't care what becomes of that beautiful thing?"

"Why should I? I know. As soon as it is done I shall send it to Zimmern, who will send me ten pounds for it, and either sell it for fifty or put it in a cellar."

"Damn it, Sibley, it mustn't go. I must have it. I'll buy it — unless there's something of mine you would like in exchange — but I've nothing good enough. You liked Susannah, didn't you?"

"I would willingly give you six things like this

for Susannah. Why, you'll get fifty pounds for her, and I'll only get ten for this."

"What has that got to do with it? Susannah is yours; and if you really will give me that delightful thing, I shall enjoy the sense of cheating you more even than Zimmern enjoys it."

"You are a brick, Rupert. I am enchanted to possess those sinister Elders; I shall have every one coming to my studio to see them. . . . How about the Syrian Songs? Are they very steep?"

"What, the poems do you mean? I shouldn't think so — I haven't seen them. I've got Midwood to give me a sort of description of each one, and I'm making my drawings from those. I've only done one yet — 'The Tents of Kedar' — rather nice, I think."

Sibley screwed up his eyes and took his palette-knife. "I suppose you've heard about the row the other night?" he asked, scraping ruthlessly at his Venetian archway.

"No. What row?"

"Our friend Cyril was turned out of a restaurant in Soho."

"I say — what an ass!" said Rupert. "Why can't he get drunk with his friends, instead of in public?"

"I don't think he was drunk — in fact I know he wasn't. It seems he wasn't keeping very good company. It really is tiresome of him to go on like that; there's sure to be a row."

There were always stories flying round about

Midwood. The man had two characters — the decorous, melancholy dandy of Mayfair drawing-rooms, and a much less decorous person who insisted on treating London as if it were Paris or Cairo — to London's indignation. Rupert was not a lover of Bohemian Clubs and raffish restaurants, and he merely thought it odd that a man of Midwood's refinement should spend so much time in them. The world could not be expected to understand that his vices were as much an affectation as his manners, and that he cultivated the appearance of them as a protest against the dulness of respectability. They would be very likely to take him at his own valuation; and there was no doubt that a large, and generally silent, body of public opinion was becoming restive at the liberties which he and some of his fellow-artists took with what they were pleased to call the "conventions of good taste." It was the fault of these few men that the reproach of impropriety lay upon the work of the whole group. *The Riddle* was supposed to be "daring" and rather shocking, and certainly it did show courage and enterprise in a dozen directions and in many other ways besides that of being not very suitable reading for little girls.

But of this alleged tendency of his work Rupert was quite unconscious. He thought that Midwood twanged the erotic string a little too much, but it was all unimportant to him so long as the work was good. Not what was done, but how it was done, was what mattered. He had a great contempt for

middle-class and Philistine views, and thought that anything which the majority of people were convinced about was probably wrong.

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He had two or three interviews with Freddy Steinman about the treatment, size, and reproduction of his drawings. The paper was being specially made for the book, and types specially cut for it; it was really going to be a superb thing, and subscriptions were already coming in for the edition of four hundred copies. Steinman was much preoccupied with it; Rupert thought that he seemed to be worrying himself unnecessarily. He tried to hurry the drawings on, but Rupert refused to be hurried.

"No, you gave me twelve months, and I'll take twelve months," he said. "But if you worry me, they won't be ready even then. You know what I mean."

"That's right," said Freddy; "but it's a big thing, you know; I want to strike while dhe iron's hot, isn't it? If dhe interest goes down, I lose my money, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," said Rupert with a grin; "but you won't lose your money. Why, you ass, Midwood's name and mine would carry through a much bigger thing than that."

The Jew looked at him with a weary, anxious air that reminded Rupert of a sick monkey. He couldn't help having a sort of liking for Freddy — he was so very anxious, and so genuinely enthusiastic. He

put his hand on Rupert's shoulders with something of his elder brother's manner.

"Well, I like enthusiasm — belief in yourself — good! You — we — want more of that in England; we want to be stirred up — 'Wake up, England,' isn't it? Ha! we wake them up with dhis book, isn't it?"

But all the same he was anxious about something, and kept bothering Rupert to show him how he intended to treat the subjects supplied to him by Midwood for illustration, and at last Rupert refused to show him anything until it was all finished. He would not even read Midwood's poems; he had received so happy and definite a suggestion for his drawings from the notes supplied by the poet that he refused to hear anything more, lest the clearness of the pictures that had suggested themselves should be dimmed.

"How right you are!" Midwood had said. "There is nothing so true as the first impression, when it falls on a perfectly clear mind. Do it in your own way, my dear Rupert, and I shall be happy."

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All this time Rupert was living the ordinary busy life that successful youth and energy make for themselves in London. He had that magic key that opens every door; wherever he went, he was liked by men and admired by women, who did their best to spoil him; but his years at the Abbacy House had rendered him proof against their attempts. He was

very much a Londoner; his work was so great a part of his life that his taste for the old country pursuits seemed to have vanished, and he refused without a pang invitations that would once have seemed to the dormant sportsman in him too good to be true. He liked his success, he warmed to the smile of the world, and consciously enjoyed it; he went out a great deal, and delighted in the endless succession of new and interesting people that a great metropolis presents to those who live in the sunshine of rank or riches or fame. He was always to be seen at first nights, when indeed the Twelve were very much to the fore, proclaiming their boredom or bestowing their approval in a body. His father had just before his death put Rupert's name down for a certain old-fashioned club, and fortunately for him he had come up for election just before his work began to be talked about, and as no one but his sponsors knew anything about him, he was elected. If it had been six months later he would probably have been pilled, for at the "Wanderers" they do not like fame or notoriety, and prefer a well-bred level of impeccable anonymity.

It was characteristic of him to frequent this club, where no one knew or cared anything about pictures, where testy old gentlemen fidgeted for half-an-hour before indignantly pointing out that a particular footstool had been moved, and where he talked to men about the things that they were interested in, and never about his own concerns. He liked the escape from the conscious, mannered world of his

fellow-artists to this half-grotesque museum of class ideas, class manners, class standards, where what your grandfather had done, and your father had been, mattered so much more than what you did or were yourself. When old Lord Carrick said fiercely to Rupert in the smoking-room, "Your father shot with me in '66, sir!" his social position in London was established; and he might have painted like a Rembrandt or a Murillo, without adding to it one jot.

He went for week-ends to country houses, and was bored or amused, as the case might be; he went to the usual dinner parties, and was brilliant or not, according to the cleverness or attractiveness of the woman he took in. But he stuck chiefly to London and to his work. He shrank from going back to Rathshene, in some degree dreading its hold upon him and its disturbing influence on the new life he had made for himself; and in some degree fearing that disillusion which so often lurks in old scenes that the stream of our lives has forsaken. His aunt did not live there very much, and never alone; she spent a good deal of time at an English Spa, and seemed to enjoy it, so Rupert had no misgivings about her. He sometimes devoted a week-end to her, and always promised himself that he would pay the Abbacy a long visit. But when the time came there was generally some continental picture-gallery that had to be visited, some piece of the old artistic lee-way to be made up, and the opportunity would go by.

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He was sitting in the park one summer afternoon watching the stream of carriages flow by, and idly admiring the colour and movement of the scene. The green of the trees was till fresh, the beds and borders were gay with flowers, and both the carriage road and the footpath were moving bands of colour, alive with the gleam and flutter of light fabrics of a thousand hues. He watched the faces as they passed him, especially the women's faces; they seemed to make a disturbing music, like that of a slow languorous waltz, and wakened in him a hunger for some transcendent emotion, the *veritable amour* of which he had often dreamed, but which never came to him.

He had known little loves, for he examined everything the Fates put in his way; but somehow he had never been able to put his whole heart into them. A part of him always withheld itself, looking on, an embarrassing spectator of these affairs; it said nothing, but just waited, and ultimately froze out the simulated ardours of his other self. He would even have liked to be married, but the girls whom he met at dances and in country houses, although they were nearly always attractive and turned out in a charming pattern, seemed to him hardly serious human beings. They were a commercial article, turned out for the marriage market, and not intended to grow up until the blessed words "so long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement" had been safely pronounced. Besides, in the world in which he moved the couple of thousand

a year which he made was not regarded seriously as an income. He was not expected to make love to the daughters of the houses which he frequented, and he found it easy not to. . . .

He heard a voice beside him saying in a soft, rather drawling tone, "It is you, isn't it? I can't wait any longer for you to look round."

He turned quickly. A pretty, fashionably dressed woman had taken the chair beside and a little behind his. As he raised his hat and mechanically took the offered hand, he was aware that the face was a perfectly familiar one, but for a second or two he found no link to connect it with himself. Then he remembered, and blushed hotly, stammering some words of conventional greeting. The roar of Piccadilly and the swish and rattle of the passing carriages became the crashing of surf on the beach at Funchal. To do the lady justice she blushed a little also, but the eyes that had shone like stars in the dark of that night five years ago were now discreetly veiled beneath drooping lids.

His outward embarrassment was only momentary, although his heart, after his first thump, had continued to beat like a hammer.

"I thought you were at the other end of the world," he said, looking at her rather severely, and wondering whether she intended to remember, and, oh heavens! to remind him. She was very pretty; much prettier than he remembered her, much more smart and *voyante*.

"So I was, but I came back a year ago. It's a

wonder we haven't met before. I saw you at the St. James's the other night. *Rather* an amusing play, wasn't it? and just a little bit shocking."

"Yes, Winstanley is always clever and delightful. But I thought you lived at Brighton?" They were getting safely on to general subjects.

"Oh, I gave up my house there and have a flat in town now. So much more convenient, don't you think. I adore town, don't you?"

"Oh, of course; it's the only place to live if one wants to see or do anything." Evidently she was not going to remember.

"When my mother died I gave up the house in Brighton. You remember my mother?"

"Dear me, I am sorry; yes, of course." This was getting dangerous; Rupert had a perfectly clear remembrance of a mild and rather fatuous old lady who was always knitting, and who had an air of not objecting to anything.

"That was three years ago, poor dear. It seems a long time ago — doesn't it?" she added, lifting her eyelids and sending Rupert a flashing glance. It was a challenge; there was something either of humour or defiance in it — he could not tell which.

But he was very definitely aware of something stealing over him — a kind of agreeable paralysis of the will, and a faint stirring of memory in the senses, like the first flutter of wings that have been folded in a long sleep.

"Yes, a long time," he answered, returning her glance and then looking away. Again the roar of

the traffic changed to the rush and crumble of the sea, brushed from the ship's side.

"Well, you haven't been idle, have you," said Mrs. Lane. "I'm always seeing your name in the papers; it must be *rather* nice to have the whole world fussing round you." The tired, drawling voice said more than the words; there was a flattering caress in it, of a kind against which Rupert was never quite proof. Certainly she *was* very pretty, he thought, looking at her sideways, and had improved immensely; she seemed to be finer and more slender, and yet to have acquired a certain voluptuous charm that she had not possessed before.

Suddenly she rose. "Here's my carriage," she said, as a victoria drew up by the kerb; "let me give you some tea — I live in Ennismore Gardens." She turned to the carriage as though she took his acceptance for granted. Rupert hesitated; he had nothing to do, he felt lonely; this ending of an escapade in decorous commonplace would help to obliterate it, he thought; but he took his seat in the victoria not for any of these reasons. He went because he wanted to go.

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Rupert's critical eye, travelling up the coachman's back, told him that the carriage was jobbed — but from a good firm. When they reached Ennismore Gardens, a slight delay in the answering of the bell, the hurried appearance of the sixteen-year-old page boy, very hot and limp about the collar and buttoning the last button of his coat, and a flutter of skirts

as of some one fleeing from one room to another, suggested a certain lack of discipline, if not of moral tone, in the servants' quarters. The furniture was obviously hired — but from Warings; and though Rupert was no economist, he knew that the establishment could not be run for much less than fifteen hundred a year. All of which piqued his curiosity.

They sat in a rather yellow drawing-room singularly devoid of any personal touch. There were very few books, and but for them and some flowers the room was exactly as (probably) Warings' foreman had arranged it. But Mrs. Lane furnished it quite sufficiently, Rupert thought, as she lay neatly on the big sofa and languidly made tea. They talked about commonplaces, and Rupert was conscious of a mingled sensation of relief and disappointment. He wandered about the room talking, her eyes following him as he paced up and down.

Presently Mrs. Lane slipped off the sofa and came over to where Rupert was standing examining an old china bowl. "Do you know what I've been dying to do all afternoon?" she asked, standing close beside him.

"I haven't an idea," he said, putting down the bowl and turning to her with a smile.

As he turned, her two slender arms glided up his shoulders and the hands met behind his neck, drawing his face to hers. "That!" she murmured, kissing his mouth. "That, and that, and that!" She had to stand on tip-toe to reach him, and when she had kissed him she fell back a little so that he

instinctively put his arms round her to support her. All the rest followed as a matter of course. The passion that quivered in her voice and body blew upon the embers of memory, fanning his senses into fire, and he found his own lips pressed against her hot face and neck.

The wave of passion passed, leaving Rupert angry with himself and her; and yet his hands crept almost of themselves about the yielding form, holding it still closer to him. Her face was pressed against his shoulder, and the scent of her hair was faint and fragrant.

There was a pause in which the ticking of the Sheraton clock sounded busily, methodically. Then the silence was broken by a long sigh, and Mildred Lane looked up into his face with shining eyes.

"Is it really you? Have I got you back again? My wonderful boy! why did we ever love each other? oh why, why?"

Rupert kissed her mouth — not because he was carried away, but because her words, the abandoned infatuation in her looks, shocked his finer senses, and to kiss her was to silence her. And yet though his mind looked on, rather dismayed by this reunion, and in no degree partaking in it, there were other senses that it gratified. His grey eyes, looking out over her head into a far corner of the room, hardened a little. After all, why not? Here was love offering itself; an artist could not live by drawing alone; adventure, experience, emotion, were all necessary — why not? . . .

She was speaking again, speaking her crude physical admiration of him, all swept away as she was by desire, and the instinct to hold him, and the sense that he was not secure. He stopped her speech again with kisses, and even as he gave them felt that they fed the fire within himself.

Suddenly she took her arms away and sank down in a chair, covering her face with her hands, but uttering no sound. She seemed to be thinking. Rupert felt awkward standing by himself on the hearthrug, and came over to where she sat. She took her hands away from her face and stretched them out to him, holding him off.

"Listen," she said quite gravely, but with a little tremble in her voice. "You must be kind to me and help me, just this once, will you? I want you to come back this evening and dine with me — I'm quite alone; will you? I ask it as a favour — Rupert."

"You are sure you want me to? You are sure it's wise? I mean — you know what I mean." Rupert, agitated, dropped into his boyish manner. The rôle of Joseph had always seemed to him a grotesque one, and rather ill-mannered. His sense of chivalry was not confounded with morality; it seemed to him that if he drifted into a position in which a woman offered herself to him, it was boorish and priggish to refuse. She gave so much more than she asked. And he had an irritating sense that the adventure had been left at an impossible stage — it must develop one way or the other. Moreover, he was grate-

ful to her for not expecting an impromptu love scene. He was excessively fastidious in such a matter; and love mingled with upholstery and the terror of servants' footfalls was impossible for him. The stage must be set, and the limelight turned on very full before he could play his part.

"I do want you to come very much." She looked prettier than ever now with her veil thrown back, her face still flushed with a genuine, shy eagerness. Rupert felt that he would have been a brute to refuse considering everything.

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And when he went back at eight o'clock he knew very well that it rested with him whether or not the thing went further. He was a little cynical about it. Such things seldom came his way; he was too fastidious to buy pleasure, and too much occupied with his work to pursue it socially with that patient, spider-like assiduity which is necessary to success. Well, here was a case where there was no sordid element; he was asked to give something, and something was offered to him; why should he not take it? And Mrs. Lane seemed to be independent of the world; well, just now she thought herself dependent on him. And at the back of his mind — can any woman understand it? — there was a quite primitive wish, purely sexual and instinctive, to correct an impression of innocence and inexperience, to show her that he was not such a fool as he once had been.

He found her looking very charming in a cream-

coloured lace gown; pearls on her throat and in her brown hair.

"How nice of you to be punctual!" She greeted him in the most formal way. Evidently the game was to be played elaborately, and he fortified himself with images from the *Arabian Nights,* where trap-doors opened in the ground and the wanderer found himself in the presence of a beautiful lady, who entertained him first with a banquet, and then with music, and then with love. The banquet was a really creditable little dinner, at which the page boy, who had recovered himself in the interval, was reinforced by a parlour-maid, whose tow-coloured hair, Rupert could not help noticing, was the same shade as a strand which had adorned the unbrushed tunic of the page in the afternoon. It made him a little uncomfortable; he wished he had not noticed it; it gave him a suspicion that the page and the parlour-maid would banquet afterwards on the remains of the feast, and perhaps, after that — bah!

He wished she did not think it necessary to talk about pictures, of which she knew nothing. He grew visibly depressed when she spoke of the Academy, and she thought he was jesting when he said he had not been there. She even rallied him daringly, and said "Perhaps they didn't hang your picture!" He grew home-sick for a world in which people would not be surprised that he had not been to the Academy — a very small world, but his own!

She had a box for Ginori, the new dancer, she said — the song and dance after the Arabian feast,

thought Rupert to himself. An electromobile whirled them to the theatre, and all the time Mrs. Lane (he could not think of her as Mildred) kept up an idle, drawling flow of small talk, which would have passed muster at Brighton, perhaps, but to Rupert's ear it rang false. She gossiped of people whom she did not know, as if no one else knew them either; and even the gossip was incorrect in its details. Her conversation might be summed up as the wrong things said in the wrong way about the wrong people. Rupert wished that it was time for the love-making to begin, for it would obliterate this stupid sensation of the second-rate, which made her seem pathetic in his eyes. She had not been pathetic in the afternoon when she had kissed him; she had been rather fine, indeed; but this anxiety to behave as she thought he would expect, the determination not to be found wanting, was pathetic, and threw a chill into the ottar-of-rose atmosphere which Rupert was trying to maintain with his Arabian images.

But the dancer was beautiful, and some other performers were amusing, and in their enjoyment of the entertainment they met on common ground. Mildred was charming when she laughed, and showed two even rows of pearly teeth; and once, when Rupert had been laughing with her, a sensation of friendliness towards her, of community with her, warmed his heart, and he turned and laid his hand on her knee.

A little sigh of pleasure escaped through her

parted lips — the sigh of some one who has reached the end of a journey.

"Shall we go?" she asked.

Rupert nodded, and in silence they went out, and in silence took their places in the carriage. It threaded its quick way through the lighted streets, through those glaring contrasts that the night reveals, when the ordinary toilers have gone home, and the lords of pleasure and the slaves of pleasure share the lamp-lit world. She put her hand in his, and lay back against the cushion, her head close to his; and she whispered her plans for their happiness, which had been arranged, he could see, to keep any sordid or troublesome element far from him. He was touched and grateful; her quiet intimacy was congenial to him now; the sense of adventure and escapade had gone from it all for the moment.

The servants had gone to bed when they reached the flat. They sat and talked a little while — this time openly of the past, the long violet nights on the *Alphege,* the magic midnight world of Funchal bay, with its basket-laden boats riding high on the glittering ocean swell, its voices and tossing lanterns, the rhythmic crash of the surf on its steep shores. . . . And when memory had done its work, and come and gone, another spirit came in; not Love himself, but that youthful understudy of his who walks so quietly in the footprints of friendship and old association, and impersonates the master for those who have never known him; seeming to be far removed from Passion, though indeed he is only

his milder brother, who went to school later and had better advantages.

When Rupert let himself quietly out into the deserted streets, he could have turned back again and kissed her; not out of gratitude, but out of pity.

IV

He worked hard in his studio for a day or two. The long grey Adam room, with its fine etchings and rare furniture, was very congenial to him; all about him he could feel the pulse of St. James's, and a few steps took him from his world of imagination to the very unimaginative, but nevertheless congenial, world of clubs. He was seldom lonely; he worked all the morning, and generally lunched at home; in the afternoon he would go to see some picture, or visit some studio, and later, perhaps, pay a duty call or two; he nearly always dined out, and would sit with a pipe and book for an hour or so before going to bed. His week-ends were generally spent in the country, or, if he were in town, in wandering about London, perhaps tracing the footprints of Wren in the narrow streets of the city, when the roar of business was all hushed and the high walls echoed the voices and footfalls of the rare pedestrians; or wandering down the river, or walking from one unfamiliar point to another, studying London in those inexhaustible pages of hers of which he never grew tired.

For one week-end he journeyed down into Corn-

wall to stay with Lady Waynefleete at Gwithian Castle, one of her late husband's seats, of which she had the use for life. He was rather tired at the end of his long train journey, and he was glad to find that there were very few people staying there, but that among them were his friend Caird and Mr. and Mrs. Graeme. He had always intended to call on Mrs. Graeme, and he looked forward to seeing something more of her in the next few days.

Caird came into his room while he was dressing for dinner.

"Well, Savage, my friend, and how are you? A little better already for a whiff of this air, I suspect. I've been out on the cliffs all day, getting just drunk on it."

"Splendid! we'll go out together to-morrow, and talk about the universe. Any one interesting here?"

"I wouldn't say interesting — harmless. Yon man Graeme's no good, except to talk politics; he gets scared at a little strong, plain Scots language. The lady's better, but she's too witty. Man, I'd have all witty women put in a bag and drowned. Her ladyship's the best of the bunch; she can't talk metaphysics; but whiles she can hold her tongue. A grand gift, that!"

Rupert was down early, and found Lady Waynefleete sitting in the hall before a wood fire. There was a sea fog creeping up, and the evening was chilly.

She greeted him warmly, and while they were talking Mrs. Graeme came in. She was dressed in very

pale grey chiffon, which showed off her sombre hair and the fine modelling of her slim, graceful shoulders and neck. Rupert saw at once that she was a beautiful woman, and he was pleased when he found that he was to take her in. She was followed into the room by her husband, a fresh-looking, middle-aged man with a rather powerful face — a banker, Rupert understood him to be. He spoke with emphasis, and briefly, but did not seem very interesting. A Major and Mrs. Wayne, relatives of their hostess; Miss Thudichum, her companion; Caird, and the local vicar and his wife completed the party.

Mrs. Graeme took up her conversation with Rupert exactly where it had been left off a couple of months ago, which, of course, flattered him; and as they sat down to dinner he asked her if any more colonels had been admonishing her against him.

"No, no colonels; I've been reduced to bishops; a bishop said some quite intelligent, rude things about you the other day, and I was disappointed to find he was confusing you with some one else. But you aren't to talk about yourself — it's too commonplace."

"What shall we talk about — the universe?" said Rupert, looking at Caird.

"Oh, not all at once — it's such a waste. A little bit at a time. You begin."

"Well — the road to Damascus."

"The road to Damascus — what's that? does one motor on it? — Oh, I see."

"What do you see, Mrs. Graeme?"

"That sword-blade on the wall — association of ideas — do say I am right?"

"No."

"Then I must give it up. But it sounds charming; please tell me."

"The road to Damascus is something I am inventing. I don't even know that there is one; but there is going to be one. It's only a drawing I am making for Midwood's poems."

"Oh, the 'Syrian Songs' — every one is talking about them, and how wonderful they are going to be — Mr. Midwood himself not the least eloquently, I assure you."

"The road to Damascus," she repeated to herself, and then turned and looked with a dawning, delightful smile into Rupert's eyes. "You know, it has a wonderful sound. One can see it — a little dusty, but with shade at the sides. Who goes on it?"

"All the world."

"Yes, of course — some in the sun and some in the shade, some on motor cars, and some on sore, lame feet — is that it?"

"Yes; and some prancing on great horses. How clever and nice of you to see my picture."

"Wait a minute; I'm not sure that I see it all — what do they go to Damascus for?"

"What does all the world go anywhere for?"

"To buy and sell?"

"Try again."

"To learn wisdom?"

"Well, perhaps in a way. But chiefly to love and be loved; don't you see?"

"Yes. It isn't really commonplace, though it seems so at first. But what a happy thing to have drawn!"

"I haven't drawn it yet — I have only just seen it; you gave me half of it when you said, 'Some in the sun, and some in the shade.' It was the tones in your voice, the notes you spoke the words on, that gave me the idea."

"But how nice to have a voice that does all that. I didn't know my voice could draw."

"It can — it will," said Rupert. "We will teach it. Say it again — please." His merry grey eyes looked frankly into hers.

"Oh, I couldn't; I am much too self-conscious."

"Yes, but please — quick; while the others are still laughing."

"How you hurry. What am I to say?"

"You know — 'some in the — '"

"*Some in the sun, and some in the shade,*" she said, very low, and with a delicious, reedy modulation, her eyes laughing into his the while.

"Thank you," said Rupert, and turned to answer a question from the vicar's wife.

He took a childish pleasure in this little secret understanding with her. He would talk quite interestedly to Mrs. Verryans about the building of cottages, knowing that he had only to turn his head to enjoy that delightful sense of congeniality that he found in Mrs. Graeme. Like all young men of

his kind, he was a little spoiled by women and hostesses; he always expected to find people both pretty and amusing wherever he went; but there was a quality about this woman that distinguished her from most of her pretty and amusing sisters. He found himself wondering what she thought of him; concerned that she should understand that he could be something other than frivolous if he chose.

He had finished a long discussion with Mrs. Verryans, and had turned to Mrs. Graeme again, but she was talking to Major Wayne. Rupert could see that she knew he was waiting to speak to her, but still she went on, appearing to be enchanted with the deadly monologue of the Anglo-Indian Major.

"Natives, now; you can't treat them like white men — they wouldn't understand it. All very well in their place — d'you follow me? But once let 'em get their heads up, and they'd be all over the place. Why, even the Tommies despise them!"

"I suppose they would," said Mrs. Graeme. "What do they think of the Tommies?"

"Oh, a native doesn't think," said the soldier, rejoicing in his crass ignorance; "not paid to. *We* do their thinking for them — the English are the brains of India, you know. And the natives like it. They need masters, and by Gad they've got 'em." He laughed, and drank some more champagne.

Rupert saw his chance. "Some in the shade, Mrs. Graeme," he said reproachfully.

"Of course," she said, turning to him, "but some in the sun! especially if they come from a hot coun-

try. It wouldn't do to let them catch cold." But she went on talking to him, which was what he wanted. She had that rare quality in a pretty woman, a sense of drollery, and the ability to express it; and Rupert felt that he was great and clever, which will tell you much more about her than a long description.

"How charming your friend is!" he said to Lady Waynefleete after dinner. "I like her so much."

"She is much more than charming; she is the finest woman I know," said Lady Waynefleete. She shook her head at him. "I'm afraid it is no use, Mr. Savage: if you were looking forward to an agreeable flirtation, let me tell you that, in spite of her *camaraderie,* it is not the slightest use."

"My dear Lady Waynefleete, I hope I can appreciate a clever and delightful woman without wanting to flirt with her," he answered. All the same he was a little huffed.

"Pretty woman, Mrs. Graeme," said Major Wayne, yawning in the smoke-room; "but not much sense of humour. Now it's a curious thing; I've knocked about a good deal, and I've very seldom found a pretty woman who had a sense of humour." . . .

"Women!" said Caird, who shared with Rupert the benefit of the Major's remarks; "if you're going to talk about women, I'm for bed. Good-night."

"Queer chap, that; Scotch, I should think," remarked the Major; and he held Rupert there for an hour, transfixed with boredom.

. . . . . .

The next morning, no ladies appearing at breakfast, Rupert set off with Caird for a tramp over the cliffs. They went down through the terraced garden, between the long lines of the veronica hedges, through a side gate to a path that led up one side of the valley in which the pleasure-grounds lay; and after a steep climb they found themselves on the great flower-carpeted tableland whose edge is the sheer drop of the cliffs. All about them were the fragrance of wild flowers, the brightness of the sea, and the harsh calling of the gulls; a sweet, windy place, like the roof of the world.

"There," said Caird, taking a deep breath and looking out to where the dim blue headlands melted into the haze. "There's line for you — there's colour — *there's* something you can't splatter with ink and paint!"

Rupert had thrown himself down on the grass. "I don't know that any one wants to; certainly I don't. But why have you such a contempt for my trade?"

"Contempt? Man, it's a great trade. It's a great thing, this projecting of ideas, and impregnating the world with them — a great thing! The only thing I sometimes wonder is, if some of you realize how great it is."

"I don't think we underestimate our importance," said Rupert, looking up into the sky. "No; I don't think we can be accused of that."

"No? Well, I accuse you of it."

"Explain."

"No man can explain an accusation. But this is a condition, a state of affairs, something that *is;* and every condition has its metaphysic; I'll not say but we might expound the metaphysic of this thing."

"Bless me, I don't care what you call it. Must I talk Scotch? Expound the metaphysic of this thing to me, then, man Cair-r-rd!"

The older man smiled. "Come, then, why do you draw?"

"Because I like doing it."

"No."

"Yes; and because I must."

"Right. And why must you?"

"Because it's the thing I know I can do."

"Not enough. You know you can shoot — why don't you shoot?"

"Because — well I suppose I draw for the satisfaction it gives me to do something well — better than other people. Because I see things that way."

"Now you've said it: because you see things that way; because you see life in terms of your art?"

"Yes. I think that is it."

"Well, and it's just no good — no good at all. All wrong. You are still only learning, climbing; near the top in this matter, I admit; perhaps at the top; but that isn't the time of power with any man. You are still growing, taking in, filling up, turning life into art. Say even you're at the top of fame and mastery, or very near it — that isn't the true time of power. There's a lot of nonsense talked about mature youth being the time of power

and influence, and age a long decadence. It isn't. It's a decline, but that is when the power comes."

Rupert sat up, listening gravely to the deep, vibrating emphatic tones. "Go on. Say more; I haven't quite grasped your meaning yet, as it applies to me."

"I say there's a hidden power in you — in every man, but especially in you — that isn't revealed, can't be revealed in your work. Oh, I know your work — I know how good it is. You've thrown this flood of beauty on things that were hidden before; you have revealed new beauty. That's a great thing. But there is a greater coming. Mere beauty, loveliness; well, that's youth. You can't go on always, in this world and this age, making mere loveliness. There's something deeper for you to find — I want you to find it. I'm in a hurry for you to find it!"

"If one were ever to find it, surely it would be when, as you say, one was at the top of one's mastery?"

"*No,*" thundered Caird. "That's a dead time. Youth, growing-time is great; decline is great; but the apex, the pause, is nothing; it is a moment between two great things. When life has flowed in upon you, saturated you; when you have filled yourself full, when you have gathered up everything into yourself, when the growing process is over, when the tide turns and you begin to discharge this mass of universal energy back into life, into the open sea — then is your day of power; when you really influence and impregnate time and the world! When you

have ceased to see life in the terms of art, and begin to see art in the terms of life, man, what truth and irony and power you'll get into that message of yours!"

There was a few minutes' silence. Then Rupert said, pulling at the long grasses: "An inspiring thought, that about the true power coming when success is over. For success is not a thing that can last; it must come to an end sooner or later; and yet behind it there may lie this greater thing . . . yes . . . and yet we — I and the other men working on the same lines — it's rather against all our ideas that art is to be applied to anything but itself, even to life: 'Art with a purpose' isn't exactly our ideal."

"Never mind your catchwords," said Caird quietly. "I'm not concerned with them, nor with the other men you speak of. They aren't going to have any time of power, most of them. Of all the men I met in your rooms that night, I doubt whether more than three will be heard of fifty years hence — you, Sibley, perhaps Bowen, and yon drunken swine Cadman for a certainty!"

"Not Midwood?"

Caird shook his head. "Not Midwood," he said, gravely. "He has gone up like a rocket, all flame and flower; he's one of your zenith-men. He doesn't give back to life what he takes from it — he just bursts and scatters. They'll find the stick of him some day."

Rupert was uncomfortable. There was a disturb-

ing force in Caird's personality that carried conviction with what he said. He felt an unwonted burden pressing on him — a sense of gravity and earnestness of life. And yet these men were his fellows, and shared with him the eminence that they all seemed to have attained so easily, with so little hard climbing. He looked at Caird, who was gazing at the distant headland, and saw in his lined face, his grizzled hair, the strength and purpose in his wide forehead, firm jaw, and clear-looking eyes, evidence of years of intellectual struggle and pain, of conquest, of power. He thought of Midwood in his scented, darkened rooms . . . he wondered.

Caird jumped up. "Here come the ladies, and yon drum-faced Major with them. I'm away to smoke my pipe on the cliff."

. . . . . .

After tea that afternoon Rupert took Mrs. Graeme to show her a wonderful place he had found — a little clearing in the sea-wood at the mouth of the valley, where the turf was soft and sweet with thyme, and where, between the thick trunks and gnarled boughs of the elms, you could see a sweep of yellow sands with the surf spreading over them in a broad band of snow. "If this were Ireland the fairies would come and dance here," he said; "but Wesley frightened the fairies away from Cornwall. Listen!"

They sat on a smooth bank of green, looking out through the perspective of tree trunks to the brightness that was the sea. It was very still in the wood,

but the deep booming of the surf rose from the shore, and its overtones filled the wood with creeping harmonies, like the voice of an organ in a cathedral.

"The echo of their voices lingers here yet," she said. "I wonder where they have gone. Perhaps to Ireland, perhaps to Brittany. Do you think we could get them to come back, just for one day?"

"If they knew how friendly we were to them — perhaps. What would you ask them for?"

"I think I would ask for new eyes to see with, new ears to hear with, a new voice to speak with."

"No, not a new voice, please."

"Some in the sun, and some in the shade?" she quoted, looking from the sea to Rupert and smiling. "I am afraid you have taught me a new vanity; I shall be always trying to cajole people with my voice now. Isn't 'cajole' the right word?"

"I hope not. Let us say 'charm.'"

"Well, charm. I tried to charm some ideas about Syria from Mr. Verryans, but he would only talk about the bad hotels and the infidel churches."

"It must be a terrible place in reality, swarming with American humourists and Cook's tours. We'll make a better Syria than that."

"Do you know what I was doing this morning?"

"I know what you were *not* doing, alas! — going for a walk with me."

"It was better than that. I was digging in the library, and reading books about — what do you think?"

"Indian administration?"

"Damascus."

"How very nice of you!"

"So perhaps I shall meet you somewhere on the road to Damascus." She said it smiling, and looking down at some flowers she held in her hand.

Rupert wondered exactly what or how much she meant; she was not the kind of woman likely to give openings for flirtation; she was one of those rare women who seem, in whatever environment they may be, to be surrounded by their own subtle atmosphere of grace and beauty and dignity, in which the things of the spirit open and flower, but in which the bare and commonplace dries up and withers. He answered her in the same strain.

"Perhaps we may even walk a little way together?"

"Oh, no!" she shook her head, still smiling; "you will be in the sun, and I shall be in the shade! And we shall be going opposite ways. You forget; I've been to Damascus — this morning in the library," she added, turning her laughing eyes to his, and then looking again at her flowers.

He looked at her attentively and gravely — at the long, graceful lines in which her attitude spoke to his eye; at the sweeping, downcast eyelids; at the grave, beautiful modelling of the features; and he spoke his thought, almost to himself, not heeding her: "Ah! I expect you have been in the very heart of Damascus. And not alone."

Perhaps her colour deepened by the faintest tinge

— he was not sure. It was her turn to look grave. She looked clearly into his eyes. "And you?"

"I don't think I have ever been nearer than the outskirts. But I've seen its domes and minarets — from the desert."

Her fastidious ear detected and resented the last sentimentality.

"You don't look as if you had wandered much in the desert, you know," she said in a lighter tone. "Just think — wasn't it from Mount Pisgah you saw it? I don't remember whether one can see Damascus from Mount Pisgah — I must go to the library again; but I daresay you could, with your trained eye."

Rupert felt that he had been gently corrected for something — he could not quite have told what. "Well, you must look out for me on the road," he said.

"Oh, yes. You will be very hot, in the sun. Perhaps I shall be carrying sherbet, or a skin of liquorice water, with a string of bright brass saucers to dispense it from; and you will hear me chanting, 'O bountiful one, cool and refreshing, purify thy blood.' And you will stop all your camels and dromedaries, with their bells and scarlet trappings and gold fringes hanging to their knees; and your Bedawin will dismount and beat their tom-toms, and the sellers of khamio and dates and parched grain and sweetmeats will come round us, and we will have a feast, and watch the other travellers riding or walking by."

"And then?"

"And then you will go on to Damascus; and I shall watch the long train winding away, all the mules loaded with silks and carpets, and flasks of ottar and sandal-wood oil, and henna and kohl and rose-water; and I shall watch until it fades away, and the sound of the bells dies with it, and there is nothing but a little whirl of golden desert dust."

She was leaning back a little, with her hands on the bank on either side to support her, and looking out between the tree trunks with the same curious, far-away smile on her face.

"That seems delightful — for me. But what about you?"

"Oh, you forget. I shall be coming back" . . .

. . . . . .

"Where will you be coming back from?" At the sound of a third voice both Rupert and Mrs. Graeme started slightly, so absorbed had they become in this little play of the imagination. Mr. Graeme had come into the clearing behind them and was looking down at them now with a friendly interest in his intelligent eyes. He was a tall man with a close, fair beard and moustache, and looked very pleasant and distinguished, Rupert thought; still he was an interruption.

"Coming back from Damascus, dear Charles," said his wife, looking up at him; "you haven't the least idea what I mean, and we shall not tell you — shall we, Mr. Savage?"

"Certainly not," laughed Rupert, and added mischievously: "I am glad you are coming back, because then you might go again."

She looked at him with the gentlest suggestion of rebuke, and then they all three talked about the view until it was time to go back to the castle.

During the rest of his visit Rupert got to know the Graemes better, and to like them very much. He found Mrs. Graeme a little puzzling and elusive sometimes, and tried in vain to recover with her the intimate mood of that afternoon. But the more he saw of her, the more he was aware of the curious strength and distinction of her personality. Her beauty was not a sensuous beauty, nor her charm a sensuous charm; one could talk to her intimately without that pre-occupation of sex which is at once the attraction and the monotony of so many beautiful women. And yet the more Rupert saw of her the more he perceived that she was quite lovely, with an almost classical loveliness whose appeal was gradual and cumulative, like that of a great work of art. And with all her friendliness and humour, there was an evident reserve of her deeper self that added an element of puzzling uncertainty to her apparent frankness.

Charles Graeme, her husband, treated her with an assiduous and ceremonious courtship that one either thought agreeable or tiresome according as one was more interested in him or in her. He waited upon her, followed her, made one of the group of people bidding for her attention, and was treated by her

with an impartiality that was on the whole flattering.

He was an extremely intelligent man, with a good deal of quiet restrained strength; he was a collector, and had a wide knowledge of antique art; he took very little interest in modern art. Rupert liked him better when they were alone in the smoking-room than when his wife was present.

V

Mildred Lane sat at the Sheraton desk in her yellow drawing-room, sorting bills and drawing cheques. She wrote a large, rather discursive hand, and her pen travelled over the paper with quick jerks. When she was engaged with accounts or cheque-books she knitted her brows and hardened her mouth; it was her way of being business-like. Beside her on the desk lay a drawing of herself, done by Rupert Savage — the drawing of a woman's head, with the hair streaming loose about her naked shoulders. It was not a very good drawing, for Rupert had no genius for portraiture, and it was not signed; but once or twice she would turn from her cheque-book, the frown would fade from her brow, the mouth would relax, and she would kiss the indifferent likeness of herself with a clinging, passionate kiss. Then she would go back to her accounts.

The telephone trilled on the table beside her, and she took up the receiver. "Yes? . . . Oh, all right, thank you, dear — very busy doing my accounts."

In the silence that followed, broken only by the crackling of the voice in the telephone, her face took on an expression of annoyance, and the furrow re-

appeared in her brow. But when she spoke she smiled gaily, as though the person at the other end could see as well as hear.

"That would be nice . . . yes . . . what, this afternoon? Oh yes . . . but listen, dear. Your poor Milly has *such* a shocking headache, and she was going to be very wise and go and lie down. As soon as she had finished she was going off to be tucked up, and try and sleep her headache away, so as to be all pretty and fresh for this evening. Don't you think — what? . . . Yes, very well, half-past seven. . . . Poor dear, only a week more, and then! . . . Yes, very happy. Good-bye. Half-past seven."

She hung up the receiver again, and sat looking at the telephone with a curious expression of detachment and dislike, as though it were an animate being. She waited thus for a minute, and then took up the receiver again, this time laying her ear caressingly against it, resting her chin on her hand, and looking down at the little pedestal with drooping lids. "0209 Gerrard," she said, and then waited, her breath coming quicker in anxiety lest she should hear the hoarse drumming that meant delay.

But suddenly her eyes lightened, and she spoke softly: "It's me." Then the tired look came back to her face, a look of resolution with it, but unhappy resolution.

"Look here, I've got something to tell you, I can't write it, or say it into the telephone. Will you come this afternoon at five — just for half-an-hour?

. . . Yes, very important . . . Oh Rupert, how naughty you are! No, you mustn't. I'll explain . . . no, I can't here or now, but this afternoon. Don't be late. Good-bye."

She put her papers away with a weary air, and then went to her room; when she reappeared an hour later she was very carefully but quietly dressed, and her hair had been done in a different way — not so low over the forehead, not in so many coils and curves, but more plainly, less consciously. She sat down on the sofa with a book, but did not read it; but sat staring at the wall opposite until, just as the clock was chiming five, the page announced, "Mr. Savage."

He shook hands, and when the door had closed, bent over and kissed her forehead. "Why, you've done your hair differently," he said; "I wonder if I like it as much? I don't believe I do."

"Never mind," she said, gently pushing him into a chair near her; she was pleased that he had noticed it, but she sighed all the same. He saw that something was amiss.

"Now what are these terrific things you have to tell me," he said lightly; "let's see if we can't rob them of their terrors."

"No; it's something really serious this time." She was holding her handkerchief tightly in her hand. "I'm afraid you'll loathe me."

Rupert winced at the exaggeration of the word. "What nonsense have you got into your head now?" he asked quietly.

"It isn't nonsense. It's serious." She was nearly crying, but was putting a strong constraint on herself. "Perhaps you won't think so. Anyway I'm going to be married next week."

Rupert jumped up as if he had been shot. "Ma— good God." He spoke very slowly, looking at her with a gaze from which she shrank. Then he sat down again.

"Will you tell me exactly what you mean?"

"I mean that — that I'm going to be married next week." She looked on the ground, and began to speak more quickly. "I can't get out of it — I don't know that I want to; you don't love me — oh, I know you like me a little when you are with me, but I don't belong to you. I'm outside all your real life. Do you think I don't know that? And you —"

"Never mind me," said Rupert, interrupting her harshly. "What about you? How do you stand? Explain."

"I *am* trying to explain, but you won't let me. Don't look so hard at me, *please,* Rupert, don't! I'm trying hard not to cry and make a scene, but you don't help me."

He sighed. "May I smoke," he asked, taking a cigarette from the silver box. "Thank you. Now I'm listening." He drew a long breath, and the smoke curled about his head.

"He's much older than me. He has known me for ages, and wanted me, but I couldn't bear him then. When my mother died he was kind to me,

and took me for a journey in France and Germany."

Rupert turned and looked at her, and then looked away again.

"Oh no, nothing of that sort. You don't understand; he was old enough to be my father, and I didn't love him."

"And you went a trip with him on the Continent; I quite understand," said Rupert sarcastically. "May I ask the name of this fortunate gentleman?"

"I don't think it concerns you," she answered, with a certain dignity; "certainly not when you ask like that. Oh, Rupert, you are so clever about other people; won't you try to understand me? Don't you see how miserable I am?"

He lit another cigarette. "I am sorry if I hurt you — I didn't mean to do that. But I still don't understand."

"And it is really very simple. Ask some of your clever women friends; they would understand," she said bitterly. "This man was always asking me to marry him, and he was always very kind, and never really bothered me, or tried to make love to me. And then the mines that nearly all my mother's money was in failed, and I didn't know what I had or hadn't; and he arranged things for me, and when I left Brighton he gave me this flat. I had no other friends."

"What, this is his flat?"

"In a way, yes — he gave it to me."

"Who pays the bills?"

"He does.'

Rupert threw his cigarette into the fire-place and rose from his chair, white with indignation.

"And you let me come here, on the terms I did, knowing nothing, believing that the house was your own, and all the time you were another man's paid mistress!"

"How dare you?" she said, clenching her hands angrily. "How dare you say that, you coward! It isn't true. I'm not his mistress, and never have been."

"Then it's all the worse — oh, a thousand times worse." He began to walk up and down with short, angry strides. "He trusts you, he's going to marry you; he seems to have behaved like a gentleman all the time; he's been your best friend; he's stood between you and the world — and you — ah!" He made a gesture of unutterable contempt. "And then look at me," he went on, turning to her; "I've eaten his food, I've drunk his wine, and — good God, you've treated him simply damnably, and you've made me treat him damnably!"

As his anger rose, she grew calmer, and looked at him with a steady scrutiny, as though she were revolving something in her mind.

"Listen," she said, speaking gravely and earnestly, and with a quiet dignity that arrested Rupert's attention. "I understand all you feel, and I am very, very sorry. But it is not as you say. Neither you nor I have hurt him. What has happened between you and me won't affect him, because

there will be nothing of that sort between us — except just at first, perhaps," she added a little confusedly. "You don't know him — he isn't that sort; he wants my companionship — that is all. I was lonely, I wanted love; I read about you, saw your work; I remembered how dear and nice you used to be. I had this grey vista sketching before me, of being the housekeeper (for that's all it is) of an elderly man, who is more like a child than a man — to whom I shall have to behave like a kind nurse — who will treat me like an indulgent uncle. And then I saw you, and it all happened so quickly — I never thought, I just drifted. I saw the greyness closing about me, and you in the sunshine outside. I'd never had any real love — I wanted it just for a moment, before it was too late! For, although perhaps you won't believe me, I intend to be a faithful wife to him when we are married."

Rupert was sobered; he was no less horrified at the situation than before, but he began to see that she was a different being from him; that there might be elements in the situation that he did not understand. With a gesture half pitying, half asking for forgiveness, he put out his hand and touched hers.

Her eyes filled with tears. "And don't you see," she went on, "that it's *I* who pay? Do you think I haven't known, when we have been together, that your love was only momentary, that it was founded on nothing deep; that the biggest part of you was never anywhere near me? I've tried to pretend and

to forget, but I've known it all the time. And do you think I won't pay — next week and after? Do you think I can see your contempt and hatred without paying? If you think me such a criminal, comfort yourself with that — that I've paid all the time, and will always pay."

"Yes, I see," said Rupert heavily. "But it doesn't comfort me that you should suffer. I'm only puzzled; it is such a tangle. I think you ought to tell him."

She smiled tearfully. "That would be very kind, wouldn't it? To spoil his one chance of happiness, and make him miserable for the rest of his life. You don't know him, you see. He wouldn't understand; he would only be terribly hurt."

"But still, *can* you go to him with all this deception hanging round your neck?"

"Women have to do worse things than that. I can, because I must." She smiled a little bitterly. "It is very like a man to say '*can* you?' It is part of the payment for my little hour of sunshine."

Rupert looked at her gravely and eagerly. "Look here, if I said anything hard or wounding at first, forgive me. I think you — we — made a terrible mistake, but I do see that it's you who pays for it. But if only I could be sure that, in spite of everything, we oughtn't to tell him! Even if he cut up rough — well — would you marry me?"

She put her hands quickly before her eyes. "Oh, don't, don't, — don't tempt me," she cried. "If you only knew!" She kept her eyes covered for a

minute, and then, with a great effort of lightness, said, "No thank you, friend Rupert; no more tangles, please. As for him, if you could once see him, you would understand how impossible and wicked it would be to tell him!"

There was a sound in the passage outside, and she darted a look of something like terror at Rupert. At the same moment she made a light, swift movement across the room, and covered over the drawing of herself that was on the writing-table. The page opened the door. "Mr. Elias, madam," he said.

Rupert, who had seen Mildred's agonized look and hurried movement without understanding them, rose and turned round with a premonition of tragedy.

A little, grey, dapper man of about fifty-five was coming forward. His cheeks were rosy like a child's, and he held a bunch of flowers in his hand. His face was wreathed in smiles as he bent over Mildred's hand with an old-fashioned air of gallantry.

"And how is her ladyship?" he asked, in happy, silky tones. "Will she deign to accept these offerings?"

"Oh, Edward, how kind! Do you know Mr. Savage? — Mr. Elias."

"Mr. Rupert Savage — the famous Mr. Rupert Savage?" asked the little man with an elaborate bow. "I am indeed honoured, sir. Your name is very well known to me — ahem — painting, I think? To make a personal acquaintance with your

works is a pleasure still in store for me; in the meantime — delighted, delighted!"

Rupert felt like some one who has been interrupted by a child in the middle of a serious discussion. He had no feeling at all about Mr. Elias, whom he tried to respond to in his own vein; he seemed to have nothing to do with the man they had been talking about; it was impossible to associate him with tragedy of any kind. Mildred treated him with a kind of pretty, maternal kindness, which enchanted him.

In a few minutes, Rupert, who had been talking as though in a dream, rose to go.

"Any friend of Mrs. Lane's," said Mr. Elias, in his silky tones, bowing and smiling again, "even if he bore a less distinguished name than that of Mr. Rupert Savage, would always be sure of a welcome from me. I trust we shall see more of you, Mr. Savage, when we — ah, return to town!"

Mildred touched his hand with her fingers. As the door closed behind him, Rupert was not sure whether it had closed on a comedy or a tragedy; but he was heartily glad to have made his own exit.

He went to a joyful and unregenerate dinner of the Twelve that night, held in a Fleet Street tavern, and pontificated with a brilliant vivacity on the art and manners of the day.

VI

The London season was unusually busy and brilliant that year, and prolonged itself far into the summer. It was remarkable for the place that intellect and the conscious cult of beauty held in it. Quite independently of Royalty and Politics, those greater suns round which the inner social system revolves and whose influence extends far out into the unlighted space of suburban and provincial life, the small constellation of genius and talent shone unusually bright that year, moving in its own orbits, and in a sense giving the season its individual character. There was many a great house, glowing nightly with the social illumination that a multitude of small people, properly amalgamated, can produce, which borrowed no lustre from lately-risen stars, and many a famous hostess whose dinner parties were no less brilliant and important, because their names were hardly ever mentioned; but that is only another way of saying that even the small world of metropolitan society is a wide world, and consists not of one but of many social systems, linked here and there by stars that are interchangeable, and revolve now in one orbit, now in another.

In that particular planetary system that deter-

mined what o'clock it was in matters of art and lively intellect there was a remarkable activity that year — a sense of life and exhilaration, a conscious and deliberate cultivation of beauty that made a delightful excitement for people who were beautiful themselves, or who made and studied and expounded beautiful things. There was necessarily a great deal of charlatanism and nonsense, and many a good word got sadly abused; self-indulgence became Paganism, and unashamed sensuality, provided it was crowned with flowers and peppered with intellect, was called the Greek view of life. Not to avow oneself a Pagan, and not to hold the Greek view of life, was in certain circles to write oneself down as hopelessly dull and out of date.

Nevertheless this current of quickened enjoyment drew its life from a very real movement of the heavenly bodies, and notably from that conjunction of the intellectual and plastic arts that had given the Twelve their place and reputation. Among them they supplied the material, itself sound and beautiful, if not always very well seasoned, out of which such a palace of affectations and insincerities came to be built. Winstanley's epigrams were on people's lips, just as Cadman's enamels (when they could afford them) adorned their persons and their rooms; Jeyne's utopias, which seemed to promise opportunities for a freer indulgence in Paganism and the Greek view of life, were discussed with pretty, knitted brows, and formed the subjects of afternoon lectures in smart hotels, where afterwards tea and

absinthe could be sipped in leaf-shaded courtyards, and the Greek view of life expounded to the splash of fountains and the voluptuous yearning tones of violins. It was the right thing to have an original Savage or two in great white frames in your drawing-room, just as it was necessary to have Marston's last novel bound in faded yellow or green on your table.

Most of these things were well worth having and doing and enjoying; but it seemed to be impossible to have them or do them in moderation. There was something about them that seemed to kill the effect of the older, slower, more patient and less arrogant work; you could not hang a picture of Bowen's in the same room with a Romney — and the Romney went. If one of Gaston St. Paul's *macabre* tone-poems preceded a Beethoven symphony at an afternoon concert, the room half-emptied before the symphony began; if the symphony was first, half the audience came late. Because the Philistine critics called Rupert Savage's work morbid, and the erotic arabesques of Midwood unclean, terrible little people tried to draw morbidly, horrible little people tried to write uncleanly — and with success. The work of these men began to have a quite false and unholy fascination for people who could never have even begun to understand it; and these were the people who began to clamour and disgust the dull, sane world with what had inspired their nastiness.

The last man to realize anything of all this was Rupert Savage. Much as he loved critical apprecia-

tion, he was entirely indifferent to the applause of the crowd, and it never occurred to him to doubt that all his fellow-artists were the same. He moved about in the light, in the excitement, in a stimulating world of intelligence and appreciation; he crossed and recrossed the orbits of his fellow-stars, always striking fire and light from the meeting. If he met Edmund Heath in Regent Street, and they stopped for a moment to talk, it seemed as though the gay vista of Regent Street had been suddenly prepared to be a setting for their words; the sun shone for him, the twinkling lights of Westminster under a haze of violet were beautiful for him; Joachim played divinely, Marchesi sang supremely for him; the waving banner of *Die Meistersinger* or the black flag of *Tristan und Isolde* were unfurled for him at Covent Garden.

He told Caird of this sense of joy and possession in everything around him one day when they were walking in Kensington Gardens. Caird's eyes flashed, and he flung out an arm towards the palace-like illusion of houses in Lancaster Gate floating in the haze above the Serpentine.

"Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Moab is my washpot, and over Edom will I cast out my shoe!" he said in his deep voice. "It is right to feel like that; it is the feeling of a God. All these things are nothing, if they are not yours and mine."

. . . . . .

Rupert had called at the Graemes' house in Curzon Street not long after his visit to Gwithians. He

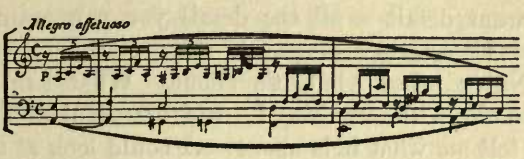
had decided to go, and then put off going, several days in succession; he did not quite know why, for he was looking forward with unusual pleasure to seeing Mrs. Graeme in her own house; perhaps he wanted to savour the pleasure in anticipation and not to realize it too soon. At any rate, when he found that she was not in town, that she and her husband were travelling in Norway, and would be away the whole of the summer, he turned away with a singular sense of blankness and disappointment. He realized how much he had wanted to see her, and felt almost angry with her for being away; how foolish to leave town now, just when everything was most interesting. He had been looking forward to talking over his work with her — a thing he hardly ever did with women now; how tiresome of her! Probably it was Graeme, confound him! And she would miss the "Modern Artists," in which would be some of his latest work — and one thing especially that he had just finished, and that he wanted her to see before he sent it in. Damn everything!

But everything refused to be damned, and Rupert had no time to miss any one very much, although often the remembrance that Mrs. Graeme was not in London gave him a sense of blankness, like that which he had experienced in Curzon Street. But he was always on the rush — working hard in the mornings, lunching and dining out, seeing people and plays and pictures, hearing talk and music, day after day. It was in that season that Marston's "Bond Street Papers" came out, and made their

delicate little mark on the sands of time; it was then that Bowen began his great series of caricatures, which have commemorated so many people who would otherwise, and deservedly, have been forgotten. And the culmination of all these artistic events was the "Modern Artists" exhibition, in which everything that was new and courageous and confident and arrogant and sure of itself in modern painting had a place. Paris and Münich sent their latest and most interesting experiments; there were some hopeless American, and some hideous German, and some wonderful French contributions; but the day after the private view it was acknowledged that the most interesting and probably the most important thing was the one drawing that Rupert Savage had sent, and which was called "A-minor."

It was in a vein entirely new to him. It was merely the head and shoulders of a woman in a modern hat and veil, and a suggestion of lace and chiffon and gems about the neck; the pose of the head suggested an attitude of listening. What was curious was that the face was hidden behind a veil that came down between mouth and nose, cutting across the face with a sharp line — an impossible treatment, every one would have said. The face looked as though it had been carefully drawn first, and then hidden behind the veil, which was drawn with the wonderful gossamer pen-strokes of which Rupert Savage seemed to possess the secret. There was a suggestion of downcast eyes and delicate moulding of the face behind the veil. In one corner

was the tiny drawing of an angel, in the other a sinister and loathsome devil, both done with a delicacy and an appearance of carelessness that concealed consummate mastery of the grotesque. Underneath was the legend



There was a breadth and simplicity of conception in it that was new in Rupert Savage's work. There was an extraordinary suggestion of melancholy in it, too, of sombreness even; but it was a human melancholy, and lacked that touch of the diabolic that, combined with his magnificent drawing, had made the artist's reputation. It puzzled every one — it was unexpected; and not every one was agreed even about its merits at first.

Steinman and Sibley had met opposite it at the private view.

"I tell you what it is," said Steinman; "this is no good. The public won't pay our friend for this kind of thing — a portrait with the face blacked out! It's cheap. Do you know what I should write under it? Just one word, 'Finish' — isn't it? That's the end of Rupert Savage."

"Suppose it were the beginning?" said Sibley musingly, and screwing up his eyes at the drawing.

"I admit it looks like one or the other — but I don't think it's the end of anything, with that drawing in it. Look at those two lines — why, look at the pattern woven into that veil!"

"Yes, but what is it all about?" asked Steinman. "You don't want breadth in black and white; you want detail — all the detail you can cram in, isn't it?"

"Never mind what it's about. What has that got to do with anything? It's beautiful! Those lines tell *me* what it is about — I could look at them for hours."

"I tell you what it is, my boy; I may not know much about pictures, but I know about markets, and if my friends wanted to realize their money, I should say, 'Sell Rupert Savages.'"

"Ah," smiled Sibley. "That is another matter; no doubt you are right."

But for once he was not right. The beautiful, mysterious "A-minor" was talked about; the illustrated papers had weird reproductions of it, with a portrait of Schumann in one corner of the page and of Rupert Savage in another; people who loved music and did not care for drawing went to see it in shoals, and when the A-minor concerto was next played in London, the audience was augmented by many earnest artistic souls who did not care for music. The musical people looked disappointed at the exhibition, and the painting people looked puzzled at the concert. The drawing was not for sale; it was entered in the catalogue as "lent by the Count-

ess of Waynefleete," but no one remembered having seen it in her house.

Coulson, the pope of academic criticism in London, who had hitherto held out against Rupert and his school, regarding them as clever but mischievous children, placed the pinnacle on Rupert's reputation by devoting a long paragraph to a pompous, grudging admission that his work was serious and important. He ended a contemptuous notice of the exhibition by saying:

"Amid this melancholy array of perverted talents, and in a world of artistic anarchy in which laws are only recognized in order to be broken, and the canons of good taste admitted only that they may be outraged; in which the patient servitude to their art of the classical painters is replaced by a total disregard of artistic economy and an almost impudently facile craftsmanship that presumes to dominate the whole cosmos of art, we were agreeably disappointed by the excellent drawing which Mr. Rupert Savage has permitted himself to entitle 'A-minor.' We regret the affectation, but we cannot deny the beauty of the conception nor the soundness of the workmanship. We understand that Mr. Savage has earned a considerable reputation among those connoisseurs of two continents who take pleasure in all that is new and strange in art; and if that is the case he is the more to be commended for having apparently surmounted the obstacles which his friends have put in his way. There is nothing

morbid or unpleasant in this work, which could much more modestly and truthfully have been entitled simply, 'A Study in Black and White.' We need not concern ourselves here with the subject of it, which has been more than sufficiently discussed; Mr. Savage, it seems, could not tear himself away from the custom of his school, nor forego that seasoning of interest derived from some other art, with which the 'Modern Artists' like to spice their work. Usually it is literature; in this case we have music dragged in by the heels in order to invest with mystery an otherwise straightforward piece of work, and to vitiate a composition which, left to speak for itself, would proclaim its author to be the possessor of technique so masterly as almost to earn for him the oft-claimed, rarely-earned title of Genius."

This ponderous tribute was hailed by the Twelve as their greatest triumph, much as they despised the writer of it. The securing of his scalp was, in their eyes, Rupert's greatest achievement; and he could not help feeling more than a little elated by it himself, for Coulson, narrow, conservative, unsympathetic as he was, was bluntly and incorruptibly honest, and his knowledge of the art of every day except his own was undisputed. It was for Rupert the culminating point of a season of hard work, feverish mental activity, and brilliant success. He seemed to have reached the top of a long hill, and to be able at last to breathe freely and look about him a little. He wanted to rest from work; he had

a longing for idleness, for pleasures of a different kind from that which London offered him. He was feeling lonely again, in spite of his popularity. Since the episode with Mrs. Lane, which had made a deep impression on him, and to which he looked back with a kind of wondering disgust, he had been more self-contained, and had not given himself so freely as of old to chance intimacies, however agreeable.

Caird was in Scotland, Sibley and Bowen were in Paris, Lady Waynefleete was in Austria, Midwood became more and more artificial and affected, and was less and less agreeable in company. When he did go out, he simply performed all the time, or, if he could not dominate his environment, sulked and was sarcastic. Rupert was sitting rather disconsolately in his studio one hot day towards the end of July when a note came from Lady Angela Steinman inviting him to join them on their yacht the next week for a voyage to the Baltic; they might go to Norway later, she said.

He looked out across the green of the park, now shabby and dirty, and thought of the crisp foaming of waves out on the cool sea. He had a sudden hunger for the sea; if the *Maid of Lorne* had been in existence he would have gone to Ireland and made her his companion in his old sea haunts. But the *Maid of Lorne* was rotting in thirty fathoms, and in any case his aunt was not at the Abbacy, and the home was shut up. He might just as well go with the Steinmans — they were friendly and harmless.

It would be a change. Besides, the Graemes were in Norway. . . . Norway was a place to see. He wrote a note of acceptance, and told Hicks to look out some yachting things.

VII

"Dear Lady Waynefleete, — I see that you are back in town, and I want to know if you will come and have tea with me on Wednesday. I have been in Paris, and brought back a Diaz that is really wonderful, and I don't feel that it is really mine until I have shown it to you. It is a perfect gem of colour — the only piece of colour in a London autumn. Come early, while the light is good.

"Yours sincerely,

"Rupert Savage.

"P. S. If your friend Mrs. Graeme is back from her wanderings, and remembers who I am, do bring her with you — I know she would like the Diaz."

Celia Graeme handed the note back to Lady Waynefleete. "I should love to go. What nonsense he writes about my 'remembering' him — and we made such friends at Gwithians!"

"He thinks you have been neglecting him, dear, evidently. He is rather an exigent friend."

"I am afraid you spoil him."

"No; he can't be spoiled — one reason why I like him. . . . Did he never call?"

"I found his cards when we came back from Norway, and I was going to ask him to dine next week."

"Oh — then you didn't give him any sittings?"

"Sittings? What *do* you mean? I haven't seen him."

"Then you haven't seen this. Be prepared for a surprise, my dear; come and look."

Lady Waynefleete took her into a small boudoir, the end wall of which contained only one picture — Rupert's "A-minor."

"But — how perfectly beautiful!" said Celia slowly, her eyes resting delightedly on the pure, melancholy lines of the drawing. Then she glanced at Lady Waynefleete, and something in her expression made her look back to the picture quickly.

"Don't you recognize yourself?" asked Lady Waynefleete.

"*Me?*" she looked again at the veiled face in the drawing. "I only wish I looked like that."

"My dear, it is the image of you. How other people didn't notice it, I can't think. It was indiscreet of him, but I didn't tell him so."

"But I don't understand. What have I got to do with 'A-minor?'"

"Goodness knows — it is some association in his mind. Do you remember the first day you met him here? Well, he had just come from hearing Pachmann playing Schumann's concerto, and he was full of it. I remember he said something about Pachmann being an angel's soul in the body of a devil,

or some fantasy of that sort. And then you came in — and there you are, you see!"

"I don't quite see — one is no judge of one's own likeness, but perhaps you are right — a memory of a face that was new to him while he had the impression of the music fresh in his mind? Yes! I think I am rather pleased, if it really *is* me. Though I wonder why I am like A-minor?"

"Well, you have come off better than poor Pachmann. All that about Angel and Devil isn't Pachmann at all — it is Rupert Savage. Pachmann, apart from his inspiration, is just a jolly little man — that is all; just a jolly little man who likes playing and making faces! So I suppose he has invested you with the A-minor qualities, whatever they may be. Come, there is the carriage."

. . . . . .

Rupert looked round his long, grey room, fragrant with bunches of dark crimson carnations, and saw that the tea-table was complete and that the light was evenly diffused, so that the raying colour of the Diaz, alone on the end wall, could make its full appeal.

He was glad to be back here, in what had become his own element. The yachting trip had not been a great success, except that it had provided rest and fresh air for a number of people who needed them rather badly. Freddy Steinman had been there; and whatever might be said for him when those beady eyes of his were bulging with artistic enthu-

siasm, Freddy in the *rôle* of an English gentleman was more than impossible. The other guests had not been amusing; they had talked politics and finance, or that combination of the two with which the Union Jack is now associated, and Rupert had been, rather thankfully, out of it. The Graemes had not been encountered in Norway, although Rupert had seen their names, written the week before, in the hotel book at Molde, and had felt lonelier than ever. He had been heartily glad when the *Bonita* had turned her white stem homewards across the North Sea. He had made a sudden excuse when they put in to Aberdeen to coal, had taken the evening mail and arrived in London the next morning. Thence he had gone to Paris, and enjoyed himself in the world of studios and galleries until the craving for work summoned him home again. And now he was waiting, with an unaccountable excitement in his heart.

He heard the carriage drawing up in the street below, and the sound of the knocker on the door; he heard voices, footsteps, the rustle of silk; he saw the grave countenance of Hicks as he announced the visitors; and then the massive, dignified figure of Lady Waynefleete in dark grey, and the tall, slender presence of Celia Graeme in *vieux rose,* supplying by magic coincidence the two missing tones, made the colour scheme of his room complete. He sighed to himself as he smiled and shook hands — sighed with happiness. He had everything he wanted.

"You are Mr. Rupert Savage, aren't you?" asked Celia; "I thought I remembered you." And the smile with which she said it, half amused, half reproachful, and its reflection in Rupert's face, made them all laugh.

They admired the Diaz as it deserved to be admired. They talked about it, and about themselves, and about Norway. "I wish we had come across you there," said Celia. "Why didn't you find us out? I am sure we should have been much better for you than the Steinmans." And Rupert felt quite unable to tell her how much he agreed with her, and how much the fact that she had been in Norway had influenced his own fruitless journey there. He was rather quiet, and let Lady Waynefleete, who had often been to his studio, show Celia some of his treasures — his edition of the "Hypnoteromachia," a wonderful Spanish book of hours of the thirteenth century, a hand-coloured copy — the only one — of the Spezzia catalogue of cameos, and a few other things. He left them alone to look at the cameos, so that his presence might not be a possible cause of embarrassment, and he was glad to make an excuse to be busy with some portfolios behind them, so that he might enjoy the pleasure of looking at Celia and listening to her voice unobserved. Her charm, her beauty, her sadness made a new appeal to him; he was conscious of a sense of elation, of certainty that his perception of it meant the beginning of a new joy in life, just as he felt when he saw a great masterpiece for the first

time, and knew that knowledge of it, study of it, meant possession of it for his own.

And then Lady Waynefleete found some bound volumes of old *Salon* illustrated catalogues, and sat down to search for something she wanted to identify, and Celia went over to the other end of the room to look at some of the sketches for the "Syrian Songs." She was used to people being charming to her, but she was not used to feeling their charm so definitely as she felt Rupert's. She had an odd certainty that from moment to moment he would do and say the thing she wanted to see done, or to hear said; she felt the strength of his personality, all the more commanding because it was an unconscious strength, arising from a certain serenity of soul and mastery of circumstance. She was aware of the unusual gentleness and fineness of perception that made him thoughtful in little things; she was aware, too, as women are very quickly aware, of his quite blind, instinctive attraction to her, and, perhaps for the first time in her life, felt a kind of diffidence as to whether she had gifts worthy to bring to such a friendship. She saw his need of her — or of some one. "What a good thing I am married!" was one of her early thoughts; "probably if I wasn't I would marry him, and be no use to him." But it was only a first thought, while she could still see both herself and him definitely and clearly apart from one another. She did not think it later.

She went away that day with a strange fluttering

of wings within her, and with an outward animation that was rare even for her. Her husband, always watchful, attentive, always a student of her, noticed it; they had dined at home alone, and talked animatedly all the evening — interesting talk about interesting things — the talk of friends whose minds make a harmony, and not the mere unison or echoing octave of the ordinary married duet.

"How happy I am, my dearest, when I have you to talk to like this," said the big man rather shyly as she got up to go to bed; "much the most intelligent as well as the most beautiful companion for me in the world!"

"Dear Charles!" she said, looking at him affectionately and laying her hand for a moment on his arm. "You are always so appreciative — besides, any one but an absolute imbecile would feel wise talking to you. You are so interested in what one thinks, about anything or nothing. . . . Good-night, dear."

She turned her cheek, and he kissed it lightly and reverently, holding the door open for her and watching her long, slender figure fading in the gloom of the staircase. Then he sat down in his arm-chair, looking for a long time at the fire with wide-open, clear eyes and a furrowed brow. He had taken a cigar from the box beside him, but had not lighted it; suddenly he crushed it violently in his hand, and ground his teeth, his face twisted into an expression of helpless pain. It was a paroxysm; it passed, and left him grave and quiet again, and

tired-looking. He mixed a whisky-and-soda, took another cigar and lighted it, picked up a book and sank back in his chair with a sigh.

. . . . . .

Rupert went very soon to call on her. He went late one afternoon and found her alone in a white drawing-room that, for all the civilization expressed in its pictures and furniture, seemed to hold something of the freshness and simplicity of a country cottage. At first the room might have contained nothing but flowers and her; afterwards the other beautiful things in it seemed to steal out from the walls and take a silent part in the harmony between her and him. They talked continuously — there were no silences on that day — and laughed a great deal; the humour of so many things was revealed to them both as though for the first time; they felt as though they were exploring a new country together, and playing a game of rivalry as to which of them should announce the most interesting discoveries. Always they were on the edge of quiet laughter; it was a gay, happy hour. Afterwards Graeme came in, and was drawn into the pleasant concord of their mood; sometimes joining in it himself, but more often listening to them as one listens to two high-spirited children, who infect one with the extravagance of their mood.

"A very attractive, charming fellow," said Graeme, when Rupert had gone; "we must see more of him;" and Rupert accordingly dined in

Curzon Street the following week, and called a few days after, and had Charles Graeme to lunch with him to see the Diaz, and took Mrs. Graeme to see Sibley's pictures and to hear Siloti play, and became an intimate of the house. There was nothing remarkable in his devotion to Mrs. Graeme, for her friends were nearly all her courtiers: it was impossible to know her and not to render her a homage which, although she never received it as a matter of course, she somehow turned to the credit and improvement of those who paid it. Women who were jealous of her — and of course there were a few — said she flirted with every one who admired her; but on the other hand, the Pagans and devotees of the Greek view of life, who tried to annex her because of her beauty and her proficiency in intellectual swordsmanship, complained that she was cold, and had the soul of a Puritan in the body of a Bacchante — showing themselves, as usual, a little weak in their history and mythology. Edmund Heath, who viewed women from only one standpoint — and it was not exactly Grecian — met her among the crowd one day at Bowen's studio, and talked to her all the time.

"But why was I never told about her?" he said to Rupert when she had gone; "she is wonderful, she is delicious; one could have a great passion for her! Now, you are a young man, with great advantages. I should think you could have a delightful intrigue with that lady — it is quite obvious that her husband bores her to death."

Rupert smiled unwillingly. "For any one who has studied women as you have, Heath, you sometimes make a bad break. You're quite out of it — away out — in this case."

"Oh, then you know; you have tried? My dear boy, why look offended? After all, you know, there is only *one* supreme tribute that one can pay to any one as delightful as that. Really," he added, smiling plaintively, "I don't want to offend you, but I think that *some* of you might make love to the poor lady. I must go and see her."

And he solemnly walked off to Curzon Street the next day, with the eternal spark of hope in his libertine old heart that the apples from heaven might by some wonderful miracle fall straight into his lap. There was always a chance! and he never left it untried. What took place at the interview did not transpire; but Heath was during that evening with Sibley and Rupert, and spoke despondently about the women of England.

"I don't know," he said in his resonant voice, grave and melodious as a Stradivarius tenor; "I suppose as one grows older one gets more exacting; but the preliminaries of love become more and more tedious to me. The caprice — the eternal, delicious caprice — that is what is beautiful — when a woman to whom you have just been presented turns to you and says, 'Take me in your arms!'"

"Caprice of the farm-yard," muttered Rupert.

"Beautiful even in the farm-yard," sighed Heath, almost making it appear so by the plangent tones

of his voice. "Even there," he continued, making circles with his slender hand in the air, "amid the fluttering straw, by the green shores of the duck-pond, in the fragrant darkness of the barn, in the gross ecstasy of the pigstye, this divine drama of love is taking place. It is a *beautiful* theme, the love of the farm-yard. The hot, silent noonday, the — "

"Oh, give it a rest," said Rupert, joining in Sibley's laughter at Heath. "You can dig poetry out of anything with that voice. Now *don't* go and write a poem called 'The Eternal Caprice,' full of lines that make one hold one's breath, and a sentiment that makes one hold one's nose."

"You talk strange nonsense for an artist," said Heath: "I am not sure that I am pleased with you. It is *your* sentiment that I find revolting — the slow, timid sensuality of courtship, the long approach, the books, the flowers, the little notes — all directed to one very simple end, which might be achieved with a little honesty in a few minutes."

"The end is nothing," said Sibley; "it is the approach that is everything."

"Give me both," said Rupert, laughing, and preparing to leave the table. "No, don't get up, Sibley; continue your academic discussion. I'm sleepy."

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One day, when Rupert had taken his sketch-book to show Celia the brief descriptions or summaries of the poems with which Midwood had furnished

him, he had said, laughing, "Let us walk a little on the Road to Damascus;" and they had come, half playfully, half wistfully, to call the double progress of his work and of their friendship by that name. The intimacies that grew up between them were always veiled in gay and happy metaphors; and if in the shining of his eyes or the tones of her voice something from the deep threatened to speak, the breeze of intellect always blew on the surface, and kept it glancing and dancing in a pretty trouble that hid the set of the current beneath. They were both guarded and confident at once, happy and afraid. At first it was knowledge of themselves that made them happy, and knowledge of the world that warned them to be afraid; afterwards it was self-knowledge that flew the danger-signal, while the world lulled and reassured them. But as Rupert advanced step by step in this loving, elaborate study of his friend, he found her always wiser, always better, always deeper and truer to herself; he encouraged himself to love her, and to read more deeply in the fair page of her character and personality.

There was a good deal of awe in his affection for her; she was in many ways mysterious to him; her strength was a mystery, and the source of it, for she was neither religious nor philosophical; and the sadness that often spoke so eloquently through her vivacity and gaiety puzzled and baffled him; he did not see why any one who was so sure of herself and of the world should have that strain of melancholy in her nature. Sometimes he thought she was

not happy with her husband, but there seemed to be so much understanding between them, so much sympathy and deep affection, that he never entertained the thought for very long at a time.

Instinctively, perhaps, he avoided looking too closely; for very early in their friendship he became impatient of the thought that she existed seriously in any relationship except the one of friendship with him. It was not that he thought of being jealous of Graeme, or any one else; the world in which he and she lived was so real and so much richer and fuller than any he had inhabited before that it was for the time enough for him. Things were as they were. He knew her to be a woman incapable of any ordinary intrigue, and he had no love for intrigue himself. Sometimes the thought that she was married, that love for her had played its symphony and come to a full close, came upon him suddenly, and for a moment darkened life, like a cloud passing over the sun; but it was only for a moment. The thought was more surprising than painful — it was so oddly at variance with his abiding sense of some to-morrow which was to be the really important day in their friendship, and for which the crowded, happy hours of the present seemed no more than a preparation.

"I sometimes wonder," he said to her one day, "if you hadn't some Spanish ancestor concealed in your family tree." They were sitting in the Curzon Street drawing-room one Sunday after being together at a concert. They had not been speaking

much, and Rupert had been looking at her as she sat idly playing with a paper-knife.

She shook her head. "He is successfully hidden if he is there. I am afraid there is nothing more romantic than English and Scottish — and French, a long way back. But why Spanish?"

"I don't know — some southern race, at any rate. There is a kind of bright melancholy in you — or melancholy brightness — I don't know which, that reminds me of Spain."

"Bright melancholy is much nicer. But how?"

"You see it in Velasquez, and more especially in Goya and the landscape painters. It is a quality that I can only describe in those words — 'bright melancholy'; it belongs to southern countries, and hot, wide landscapes lying silent in the sunshine. The melancholy of a northern country is never bright. It is sombre — a melancholy of winds and waves and storms. It is sad here when it is dark; but in the south darkness is gay, and only the bright hours are sad. Think of those rolling landscapes of Zuloaga, with all the colour living vividly in the sun — and yet how melancholy they are!"

"You were growing up when you were in Spain, and that is always a sad thing in retrospect — that is why you associate Spain with melancholy — and me."

"Am I still growing up, then?"

"Surely you are. Why, aren't you glad?"

"I want to be at Damascus," said Rupert, looking at her steadily, "and it seems a very long road."

"Don't be impatient of the road, my friend. To travel is better than to arrive, you know," said Celia; but he only answered, "It depends," and their talk turned away from personal things.

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For them both the hours they spent thus came to stand out like clear crystal amid the colour of their lives. In that winter of work and friendship Rupert came to the fullest consciousness of himself and his powers; and her clarifying influence gave him a serenity of mind that had not always been his, but which steadied and deepened everything that he was and did. She saw the strength growing and unfolding in him, and was gladdened in her soul; qualities that she had divined in him, but which had been hidden beneath the fabric that fame had built up so rapidly, she now saw emerging into the light; it was as though another and more solid building was rising behind the handsome temporary frontage of success. She did not ask any questions of her heart; but she felt that he and she were drawing near to the gates of that city which they had so often pictured in various similes and ideas.

At first the Road to Damascus was identified with Rupert's drawings and designs for the "Syrian Songs"; but gradually it became less directly associated with his work, and more with their talk, their friendship, themselves. It had been her invention, but they had elaborated it together, until the road became the road of their love, and the city, the city of their dreams. At first it had been the city of

men's purpose and achievement; it was Celia who said that it must be different, and that the golden domes and minarets and crescents floating in the haze of desert sunshine could have nothing to do with achievement, but stood for the traveller's dreams of happiness.

"I see it all so clearly," she said one day when they had been having one of their half grave, half make-believe arguments; "you must let me have my way. I have only to shut my eyes, and I see them all — each one travelling in company, and yet moved by an inner inspiration. They are all holy and blithe and beautiful, and —"

"Not holy; they must not be holy!"

"Oh yes; because it is only in the best hours, the hours of exaltation, that the road can be trodden by mortal feet. It is a wonderful road! bordered by laurel and bay and myrtle and cypress and oak — all the trees that poets have ever named — and it is under the trees that the humbler travellers move — not quite so rich and secure as the stately procession in the middle, but moving on under the compelling mastery of love. Each one holds his companion's hand, and they speak seldom and softly."

"And do they all arrive?" asked Rupert, looking at the wedding-ring on the long slender hand that lay on the polished arm of the chair.

She paused a moment before answering, still in the same dreamy voice, still with the same veiled eyes.

"Yes — I think — they all arrive. They arrive at nightfall, for the progress of the hours is reckoned for each one according to the measure of his step. Some linger by the way — "

"Some linger by the way?" he echoed in a low voice, still looking at her hand.

"Linger, and lose count of the time; and their day from noon to night drags slowly. But others — "

"What of the others?" He looked up at her eyes, compelling the dropped lids to lift and reveal the sheen of dark violet beneath them. She did not drop them again, but there was no answering smile in them.

"Others are less fortunate, for they make too much haste, and arrive — alone."

"There are others still." Rupert spoke in the same quiet tone, looking earnestly into her eyes. "Oh, there are others who are happier and braver! They go on — they go on, not in tears and with timid steps, but joyfully, and they conquer time and their hour of glory in one flight — Celia!"

She looked up at him swiftly, one questioning wonder in her eyes. He laid his hand over hers. "Shall I, shall we, ever — be there?" His voice shook a little, while he waited in the silence that seemed to last for an age. She did not move or speak, and at last he looked up into her face.

She was looking at him, and her eyes were violet lakes of tears, and yet she was smiling too. "Foolish, foolish one, don't you see?" she asked him

softly. "Don't you recognize the city after all? Rupert — it is nightfall for us!"

A wave of wonder, of realization, of passionate joy swept over him and stopped the beating of his heart for a moment. He leaned swiftly towards her, gathered her two hands in his, and pressed them to his heart, and laid his cheek beside hers. All the tides of the world seemed to rush into his brain, but he only whispered, "Thank God, thank God!" He never kissed her, or took her in his arms, nor sought any of the gestures of love; they lived this moment far from their bodies, in the magic world of the soul. The beating of their hearts in unison was the only voice to which they listened; it marked for them those lightning moments of love that all our will, all our prayers, cannot avail to turn or stop.

At last she whispered: "Let us keep this a little longer — let it last us for one day!"

And he answered, whispering too, eagerly: "Yes — not another word or look — only this — for to-day!"

And with a heart in which the great drums of joy were beating, he got up and looked with radiant eyes for one long minute into hers, still wet with their happy tears. He went softly to the door, and turned to look at her again; she was smiling now — the new smile of love that only the lover sees. He answered her with a radiant regard of exulting triumph and gratitude, and was gone.

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The barrier between them was down, but they did not cross it. The mere knowledge that they were all in all to one another was so illuminating, so satisfying, that for the time it was enough, and they were both far too jealous of their joy, too exalted with the spiritual essence of their love, to let it be shadowed by the fears and miseries that would otherwise have haunted their new-found happiness. That which brought the lover such pure joy could not be allowed to bring any trouble or difficulty to the beloved — that was the unspoken thought of both of them.

They were like fellow craftsmen who had toiled together on an elaborate jewel of gold, and had awakened one morning to find it set with a crimson glowing ruby. Their love was a gift from heaven; but the setting of it, their friendship, had been of their own making; they had wrought it and shaped it, twisted and locked it together, and decorated it with such loving elaboration that it too was precious to them; their lives had grown into it. They knew every line and pattern on it, every stroke of the hammer was remembered, and every mark of the graving tool; it was dear and familiar to them, and beautiful beyond words; it was their very own. But the fire that lurked in the gem was strange and mysterious; it was elemental, it might be terrible; they would let it slumber there for a time until they had read its fiery riddle, and meanwhile, with hands that sometimes trembled a little, with hearts a little

awed, continue their labour on the kindly gold of friendship, while the pattern they traced drew slowly nearer to the centre of fire.

They agreed upon this without a word of it being ever spoken; it was all in the first encounter of their eyes when they met after the great day of revelation, when Rupert, going forward to take Celia in his arms, realized that there was an even sweeter, more intimate greeting than that — namely, his old one of sitting down beside her and kissing the tips of her fingers once. He began to speak. "Everything is changed —"

"But we shall change nothing," she answered; and he understood and was silent. The whole of life was a promise to him in those hours; promise of what, of when, of how, he did not know nor ask, feeling simply that he could trust the beneficent force that had brought him thus far, and await its time and place. Only once, and on her account, he hinted at some difficulty, some trial of the future.

"Hush!" she said softly. "It is not to things like that that the Road to Damascus leads. There must be no shadows and fears on our path. I don't want to foresee, I don't want to think. We will live like this — from day to day, with never a to-morrow." And he answered her in the same strain, uttering things equally foolish and irresponsible and perishable, and equally stamped with truth.

So they resumed the happy companionship on which Love had silently put his seal — a companionship infinitely fruitful to them, as for all men and

women in this world everything actually loved and chosen with a whole heart must be. Their meetings were full of vital and joyous exchange of themselves, as before; and though there were emotional depths beneath them, vast, silent, unplumbed, the surface was bright with the rhythm and music of comrade minds: true speech, true thought, true laughter, like sunshine on the deep sea.

VIII

THERE was no outward change to reveal this great hidden event in their lives. Rupert worked a little harder, with a deeper sense of the meaning of his life and work. His drawings in *The Riddle,* which really gave that periodical its tone and value, were no less beautiful and delicate in their detail than before, but they tended towards a greater breadth both of treatment and idea, became less impish and mocking, and more humane; they were more on the lines of the now famous "A-minor" than of his former work. He even did a series of similar designs, suggested to him by music that stirred him, and some of them were very striking; notably the design for Moskowski's great valse in G-minor — a swaying group of tiny naked figures with fans dancing on the sand under the crumbling arch of a long wave curving to break; and for a saraband of Bach — the last an exquisite piece of mannered formality, full of dignity and grace, which went straight to the heart of Paris and abides there to this day. But neither he nor his friendliest critics were quite satisfied with this vein; it represented a kind of transition period; but transition to what, no one could quite see.

Steinman, who really spent a great deal of money on the group of mannerists, and loved their work as only a Jew can love the thing of which he sees both the beginning and the end, was sometimes in despair.

"I don't know what Savage is about," he said to Sibley one day, with his hands upraised. Sibley and Midwood and Heath were lunching with him at his club on the day after the publication of the January *Riddle,* which contained, among other things, a diabolically clever and rather unpleasant poem by Midwood called "Uriah the Hittite," the first instalment of some confessions by Heath, called "The Loves of my Childhood," and Rupert Savage's "The Priest's Mother" — leaning, wind-blown figures on a high sky-line, with a few dots and lines of moving water in the foreground.

"What is it all about?" said Steinman. "There's nothing in it."

"Except drawing," said Sibley.

"But it's commonplace," said little Steinman, his face puckered. "We can get that kind of thing from the Slade School — any amount of it. No one can keep a reputation going on that. Savage seems to forget that he has his own public and his own market — they want to be startled and stirred."

Midwood laughed softly. "It is so good for them to be shocked. But I think you do our friend Rupert an injustice; to me there is something quite appallingly remote and veiled in that drawing; only he should have called it 'the Priest's Daughter.'

That would have been witty, and you can let it mean what you like."

"I see the *Critic* is pretty down on you all this morning," said Sibley; "they talk about nothing but decadence, and say Midwood's poem ought to be suppressed."

"No, really?" said Midwood. "How splendid!"

"Yes, but we mustn't overdo it," said Steinman. "And you won't mind my saying, Heath, that I hope your next batch will be a bit cooler. *I* like it — I think it is a most artistic piece of work; but even our public has its line, you know. There were one or two words — well, that bit about the school children — it isn't English, you know — I don't think they'll like it."

"Well, after *all,*" said Heath genially, "why should they like it? They are not meant to like it. Really, if it comes to doing things that the English like, I am afraid none of us can be of much use."

"Oh, I don't know," said Steinman. "We are all Englishmen here — isn't it?" he added, with an appealing glance at Sibley.

"I don't think there's much merit in being merely disliked," the painter said; "they hate my work, so it doesn't matter; but I would rather they didn't."

"My dear Steinman," said Heath more seriously, "you are doing a very difficult thing, a very noble thing, and a very pleasant thing, in trying to make the English like good work. Anything as pleasant as that can't be easy. It is easy to be sad and gloomy

and foolish and vulgar and Philistine; to be happy and wise is the most painful and difficult thing in the world. It may be necessary to hurt them in doing it — and that is why I propose to tell them about what goes on in the minds of neglected children; it will hurt them, but it will be good for them."

Steinman nodded a little doubtfully. "Not too far, you know, all the same."

"Too far? You can't go too far. Realism is the only morality worth the name."

"Then, for any sake, my dear Heath, let us be idealistic," said Midwood, tapping a cigarette against his rather coarse fingers. "If we are not immoral we are nothing. Realism is as ugly as — as virtue."

"Well, but to get to business," said Steinman, who was always uncomfortable during these airy discussions. "I don't want unpleasantness in the papers — it won't do any good. But if Savage doesn't tune up again to the old key — well, he's done for, isn't it?"

"Evidently they don't notice any difference," said Midwood; "they bracket us all together — that is where we are great. If Rupert were to draw a straight line on a piece of paper, every one would talk about its exquisite morbidity. Don't worry, Steinman — we'll see you through, old man. Our backs are broad enough to carry you."

Sibley added, as he rose to go, "I certainly wouldn't be anxious about Rupert Savage; he's

only lashing about a little, looking for the medium he wants. He'll settle down and make another fortune for you yet."

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Midwood sauntered along Piccadilly and down St. James's Street, his hands clasped behind his back, his stick trailing behind him, his head hanging forward from stooping shoulders, and his long, sallow face turned from side to side as he scrutinized those who passed him in the street. Once he stopped and watched a large pool of melted sleet and mud being shovelled into a cart; the mud-surface was iridescent, and shone in the faint sunshine with hues of opal; he smiled with pleasure at the rare glittering colour that floated on the lake of quaking mire.

If he had looked behind him he would have noticed that a plainly-dressed person in a pot hat and drab raincoat, who had been walking behind him all the way from the club, stopped also and looked at his own reflection in the blind window of a shop. When Midwood went on again, humming a little tune, the plainly-dressed person went on too, and when Midwood was knocking at Rupert's door, this apparently aimless pedestrian was just turning the corner from St. James's Street. He seemed to change his mind when the door closed on Midwood, and, after speaking to a policeman standing at the street corner, walked briskly off in the direction of Piccadilly Circus, where he went up to another

plainly-dressed person who was smoking a cigarette beside the fountain.

"Nothing so far," he said, accepting a cigarette from the loitering person. "Got up at twelve, lunched at the Albany Club with two gents — name of Steinman and Sibley; left there 3.45, walked to 21-A St. James's Place — name of Savage — Rupert Savage, artist. You'll find him there — but it's all square there. This is a mug's game. I'm off to get my tea. Same place to-morrow? Righto." And the first plainly-dressed person jumped on an Elephant 'bus, while the second walked briskly down to St. James's Place, took an interest in Rupert's old brass door-knocker, and then withdrew to the end of the street, where he contemplated the passing tide of traffic with the eye of a philosopher.

. . . . . .

Meanwhile Midwood and Freddy Steinman were sitting in Rupert's room examining such of the drawings for the "Syrian Songs" as were finished. The two men, each in his own way, were singularly sensitive to the beauty of Rupert's work; Midwood's affectations dropped from him as he examined one sheet after another, and the whole artist in him rose in homage to the beauty and fertility of invention and certainty of touch that gave to each one its quality of perfection. Steinman was delighted too. His little soul had a native appreciation of what was beautiful in art, even while his little mind was busy with figures and calculations, and rejoicing itself in the

certainty of financial profit. It is the Jews who really inhabit the artist's heaven — the place where the finest work is combined with the richest material rewards.

"Couldn't be better, my boy," said Freddy; "we are in for a safe thing. Hurry up and finish, and draw your money. Four hundred copies at ten guineas — we shall sell them all, and you will have one tousand pound each. Eh?"

"You really think so?" said Rupert. "I'm delighted. But what is best is that you are pleased, Midwood. Now, wasn't I right not to read the poems? I couldn't have done anything so near to their spirit as you say these are if I had. Those outlines you gave me inspired me, but the poems themselves would have made me despair. If you have seen a thing once done perfectly, in any medium, you can't do it again in another."

"I take off my hat to you, Rupert," said Midwood with a bow. "You are wonderfully right. These are the pictures I dreamed, only better. They will put my poems into the shade; won't they, Freddy?"

The little man laughed and looked shy. "Aren't they shady enough already, what? No, I am chaffing," he added quickly to Rupert, seeing his puzzled look. "The poems are as good as the drawings — I can't say more."

"Do you want a drink, Freddy?" asked Rupert. "You are always a thirsty little devil."

"Thanks, I don't mind. Yes, *and* a cigarette.

And that Rops on a chair in front of me — *and* the magnifying-glass. Gott! I wish I was an etcher!"

While the little man was poring over the etching, the other two men talked on by the fire — of pictures, and poems, and people, and the universe at large. Midwood was at his best, for he was talking of what he loved and understood, and Rupert felt that he liked him better than usual. There was less than usual of that faint, unpleasant mystery that hung about him like an odour, and that Rupert found so repellant.

They talked again about the "Syrian Songs," and discussed some designs which Rupert had sketched for the white vellum cover. From that they went on to speak of the publication itself.

"Who are you going to get to publish it, Freddy? — or are you going to put your own name on it?" asked Rupert.

"I have been thinking about that," said Steinman, carefully replacing the etching on an easel and drawing his chair to the fire. "I rather wanted to know what you fellows think about it. You see, any ordinary publisher will want his share of dhe profits — and it is not a book that really needs publishing in dhe ordinary way. Only some one has to appear as publisher."

"Well, why don't you publish it yourself?"

Steinman turned in his chair so that he was facing the two men. "Now we are talking business, and you must listen to me. I don't want to appear in dhe matter. Why? I am not a publisher in dhe

ordinary sense — I do not publish books. I occasionally produce a plate, or a reproduction, and I am getting up dhe value of my name and reputation. If I publish a book, all my colleagues, who are my rivals, will say, 'Ha! Steinman is not doing well with his process'; my values will go down. And even so, my name — will it add glory to dhe book?"

"No, I'm damned if it will," said Midwood, laughing.

"In other circles, yes; in your circle — London and America — no. They do not know me — yet," said the little man.

"Well, what do you propose?" asked Rupert, who did not feel that the subject was so important as Steinman made it out to be.

"I propose — this," said Freddy, speaking very precisely. "This is a personal work — it is going to sell on two names — Midwood, and Savage. Why have any other name? Appear as your own publishers; take the commercial element out of it altogether, and put on dhe title-page, 'London: published by Cyril Midwood and Rupert Savage.'"

"Not bad; what do you think, Rupert?"

"I don't know; it seems all right," said Rupert. "You aren't trying to do us in the eye, are you, Freddy? because if you are, you'll get your head punched. Besides, I don't know anything about publishing a book, and I am certain Midwood doesn't!"

Steinman waved his arms and laughed. "Do you in dhe eye — that's a good one! No, my friend, it would be too easy. But to talk seriously — it is only

a formality. Your names are on dhe title-page as publishers, but I take all dhe risk. You sign an agreement giving me dhe right to risk my money by publishing four hundred copies, I pay you a tousand pound each on publication, and take what I can get, and you keep dhe copyright of dhe poems. Of course dhe drawings are never to be reproduced, or we wouldn't get our money. Is that fair?"

"It seems a sporting offer," said Rupert. "What do you say, Midwood? So long as we don't have any bother, and he does all the work, and guarantees us our money?"

"I am only too pleased to have nothing to do with tedious details," said Midwood languidly. "If my name will save that, you can print it all over the book, Steinman."

"So," said Freddy, getting up, "I will send you dhe papers to sign. It is dhe best way; but it is a risk for me. I tell you I wouldn't take it for anyone else!"

"Get out, Freddy; you mean you wouldn't take it if you didn't see your money safe. Well, we are all quite satisfied, and we needn't bother our heads any more about it. . . . Must you go? Good-bye. Your tie wants straightening. Where do you get those wonderful ties? And why do you have cardboard shoulders in your coat? You are a weird creature, Freddy; if you weren't so rich you would be quite intolerable." And Midwood chaffed the good-natured little man out of the room.

"Give me a cigarette, O Rupert," he said, when

Rupert returned from seeing Steinman out; "one of those drugged with pleasant poison; and let us be silent after that Hebrew clatter; let us conjure up the desert sunshine, and the tinkle of the harness bells, and the resurrection of the soul, and the life of the world to come." And the poet lay back in the deep chair, and watched the first wreath of blue smoke coiling above his head.

IX

Charles Graeme came into the drawing-room where his wife was sitting alone at tea.

"My dear, this is a bore. I have to go to Liverpool this evening about that amalgamation. I thought I could have got out of it, but they have wired for me. I have just time for a cup of tea. I am sorry — aren't there some people dining?"

"Only Rupert Savage — you remember? You asked him on Sunday. Shall I put him off?"

"Of course not! I forgot. Well, that is all the better. He will be company for you — and *he* certainly won't miss me."

"What do you mean, Charles?"

"I mean that he is a very fortunate man, my dear, and that he has the perception to know it." He spoke lightly, with a smile on his grave face, and picked up a newspaper.

Suddenly Celia looked up at him with a troubled questioning expression in her eyes.

"We — we are great friends, Charles." She did not know why she said it; her heart began to beat quickly; she was frightened; she felt as if the con-

trol of her utterance had been quietly and suddenly taken away from her, and given over to some one else.

"Yes?" He looked up from the paper, and then went on reading. The grave smile was still on his face, but it had faded out of his eyes.

"Great friends. I wish you knew him as well as I do. He is very wonderful — more wonderful than his work." It was still her voice, but she seemed to herself to be listening to the words rather than speaking them.

He answered her this time without looking up from the green-tinted page.

"My dear, I am sure he is all you say, but I don't imagine that any man is likely to know him so well as a woman. And your way of liking people is different from mine, you know."

Celia listened anxiously for the sound of her own voice. She felt that it was on the point of uttering some fatal, final thing — what would it be? Presently the words came — from a very long way off, it seemed.

"That was what I meant. I — *I love Rupert Savage.*"

As she heard these astounding words forming themselves the world went dark to her; only that fiery sentence seemed to blaze in a black sky — *I love Rupert Savage.* She turned her eyes away from Graeme and looked at the still hands folded in her lap. It seemed an age in which she waited for his reply — an age in which the whole of her married

life acted itself again on the stage of her memory. . . .

There was, in fact, no appreciable pause before Graeme spoke. She heard the rustle of the paper, and then — was her sense of hearing playing her a trick? — his voice answering in its customary calm tone.

"Well — so long as you don't tell him so. Declarations like that are apt to be misunderstood, especially by men of temperament like our friend. May I have some more tea?"

The alien spirit of confession that had possessed her and used her voice now departed from her, and left her in sole control. She saw that Graeme had entirely misunderstood her, and taken her words as a purely impersonal expression of opinion. She knew that he believed her incapable of loving any one, since she did not love him. She was startled, puzzled. The impulse of literal confession, that had come from she knew not where, had made her utter to her husband the great truth of her life, had shot it like an arrow at him; and Fate had stepped in to turn the arrow aside. What did it mean? Celia was a woman accustomed to listen to the inner voices, to look and wait for the inward light, and she felt that there was a destiny in this which she dare not oppose. . . .

Her voice rippled out in laughter — the clear, true-ringing laughter that even the sincerest and most candid woman can summon to the preservation of her dear secret.

"I think Rupert has far too many declarations of affection to have his head turned by mine. He knows that I am not even original enough not to be devoted to him!"

Graeme glanced at her with rather a weary look in his eyes. "Dear Celia, may I beg you not to say things like that? I know they mean nothing, but they don't add to my happiness. Years ago we made a compact; I have kept my side of it as well as I can; I have tried to behave as though I didn't love you. Please don't make it difficult for me. We have plenty of common ground, I know; but I don't like to be reminded of — well, of the territory that I must not enter."

"I am sorry, dear, if I said anything to hurt you. Don't let us be sentimental, though. It would be a most unworthy come-down for us after all these years of friendly understanding of facts. Please, Charles, don't look so tragic, and stir your tea so savagely, or I shall think you are really trying to make a storm in your tea-cup."

He relaxed the tense expression of his features and laughed. "You are quite right, dear. I daresay I am extremely foolish. Put a little more cream in, please, to allay the raging of the waves. But as you are having a Savage to dinner, don't let him make a cannibal feast of your heart."

It was her turn to laugh, and the talk led away from the storm-centre and was maintained in a serene atmosphere until it was time for him to go.

. . . . . .

She was dressed early, and went about the house humming a little song. She loved her house; it was part of herself, and in every room the spirit of order and beauty was supreme. She was one of the women, rare in our time, who diffuse their personality far out into the world about them; her clothes, her rooms, her furniture, her books, her servants, her friends all seemed to take a certain quality from the influence of her mind, which, like the quiet rays of candlelight, showed at its best whatever she shone upon.

She felt profoundly happy because Rupert was coming. It was no sense of a guilty joy snatched from unwilling destiny that moved her, but a deep serene gladness. She looked round the room that had been the setting of so much of their friendship, and into which so much of her life had grown; and quite suddenly, in one of those chills of the imagination that give us a momentary knowledge of the terrors that lurk in the shadow of joy, she realized what it might be without him. The tip of Death's icy finger touched her heart for a second, and left it beating wildly as the blood flooded back to it. No, no, no — they could not lose each other now!

She went over to a big Venetian mirror and looked at the image of herself there. She tried to pretend that she was Rupert, and to look at the reflection with his eyes. From the pearl in her hair to the edge of the train of grey voile was one long curving line such as he loved; how glad she was that she was so slim and had such long legs, and

such a girlish, unopulent body, so that he should find delight in its form and proportion! What a strange thing the flesh was, and how deeply she disliked people who made a cult of it. Her body had always seemed to her nothing more than a visible adumbration of the invisible, intangible soul; not a thing belonging to her, to be given away, or lent, but herself. She had never realized that until after her marriage, when her soul had been astray in a black wilderness on which she never looked back, and had only saved itself, against all her preconceived and inherited ideas of woman's duty, by clinging to the truth that it and the body were one, and were mated or unmated together. Graeme, who cherished for her the incomplete, half-enlightened feeling of the unloved, ungratified lover, yielded to circumstance, and respected what he took to be a lack in her nature; she was always half in light and half in darkness to him, and while he loved and admired, he never understood her. . . . How different it would all have been if she had met Rupert long ago. How different and, as she began dimly to see, how much more just some of her views and judgments of men and women would have been, if she had not led this unreal life. When she had battled it out for herself she had thought she knew everything. Was it possible that she knew nothing? . . .

. . . . . .

"Don't move; stay exactly as you are for a minute, please." It was Rupert, who had come in

quietly, and found her still standing in a reverie before the mirror. She turned her face to him, blushing a little at her own thoughts, but she did as he asked. He went up to the mirror and kissed the spot where her mouth was reflected, and then turned to her and took both her hands. Almost at once she told him about her husband's sudden departure, and that they were to be alone.

"Celia, how wonderful! You and I, quite by ourselves — do you know we've never had dinner alone together in our lives?"

"Of course, I know. Rupert, I feel about ten years old, and so silly and happy." And she seized both his hands and spun him round in a quick revolving waltz, her grey dress sweeping out behind her in a wide fluttering circle, and her eyes dancing with a childish, mischievous light. He caught the inflection of her gay mood, and they were both standing, flushed and laughing, in the middle of the room when the butler came to announce dinner.

. . . . . .

This delightful intimate impression was heightened rather than lessened when they were sitting together at the small round table in the dining-room, Celia's well-trained servants moving in the unlighted background. The fact that they were not alone added to the sense of a happy and intimate secret shared between them, and they found no difficulty in keeping up a flow of conversation that was no less real and sparkling because it was necessarily confined to impersonal subjects. But whenever Ru-

pert looked up and saw opposite to him the oval of her face beneath its crown of dark hair, his heart gave a little jump of excited happiness; and at the sight of him sitting radiant and happy before her in her own house, at her own table, sharing her own life, the smile in her eyes shone and deepened with the sense of security that a woman feels when she sees the man she loves surrounded by the hundred expressions of herself that her home means. And though they talked of commonplace subjects in their own uncommonplace way, there were little silent flashes and messages sent across the table, smiles at the end of a sentence, pauses and hesitations between a couple of chance words, little ripples of laughter in response to inaudible speeches and invisible gestures that made it difficult even for first-footman James, the sleek and observant, to account for such high spirits at so small a dinner-party.

It was not until they were alone, and the two little cups of coffee had been served and the cigarettes lighted, that the silence fell between them and the smiles faded. An unwonted shyness took possession of Celia, an intolerable shyness; she looked at her plate, and watched the ash whitening on the end of her cigarette; but she did not look at Rupert. He was looking at her, however; like one who is conscious of the absence of a customary restraint, he allowed his eyes to rest full upon her, and to receive and enjoy that subtle and wonderful emotion that is stirred by the sense of vision; there

was no need to veil his eyes, or to hide that tell-tale message of love, nor, for once, to stifle the yearnings that rose in his hungry soul.

He looked at her leaning on the table, the downcast eyes deepening the habitual gravity of her face; and from the beautiful picture his eyes wandered away to its background and frame — the charming room, in every detail of which was expressed the cultivated love of simple and fine things, the few good pictures on the walls, the spare and beautiful appointments of the table. . . . His imagination wandered out of the dining-room into the silence of the empty house — her house, intimate and familiar to her, but a land untrodden by him; he thought of the staircase and of the unknown region that lay above the drawing-room floor. He had never thought before of Celia's house as existing above that drawing-room floor, the life of which he shared; suddenly he realized that it contained other stories and chambers, as her life itself contained regions that lay in darkness and mystery to him.

"Celia, I cannot bear it. This is not happiness; it is torture — it is hell!"

She looked up, startled at the hard tone in his voice and the bitter expression on his face, and then looked down again at her plate.

"Tell me exactly what you mean, Rupert. There must be no hell in your life where I am."

"I mean just that. I cannot bear it."

"Cannot bear sitting alone with me here?"

"Not in another man's shoes."

She raised her hands with a little gesture, half of impatience, half of despair. "How can you say that?"

"Because I mean it. Because to be sitting with you here so intimately and alone, together in one house, so near and yet so far away, is so horribly like the real thing, that it is unbearable for me to remember that this is some one else's chair, this is some one else's table, this is some one else's house, and that I am standing in some one else's shoes."

Even amid her gravity the humorous smile played for a moment round the curves of her mouth. "Why worry so much about the shoes? Believe me, no one wears them at all. They were tried and they did not fit. They seem to be pinching even you a little."

"Celia, dear love, it is not a joking matter."

She put down her cigarette and looked at him across the table. "Rupert, come here. . . . No, be quiet — stand behind my chair, put your hands over my shoulders and hold my hands and listen — once and for all. Is it possible that you do not know? Is it possible that you have known me so long and think me capable of living one of those dreadful mixed lives that one reads about? You make me so horribly shy that I hardly know how to speak to you; and yet I cannot bear to see you suffering through your own stupid misunderstanding. Can you believe me when I tell you that everything of mine that has to do with love is yours and yours only?"

"It isn't mine." The voice came with a kind of moan, half stifled in the coils of her hair.

"It is no one else's."

"Celia, do you mean — I do not understand — you belong to some one else."

"Dear, I belong to myself. You want a bald explicit assurance about details, and it is shameful of you. I won't give it you. I can only tell you that it is honestly, with a single heart, without any degrading or shameful reservations that I have said and can still say — I love you."

She had turned up her face to look into his eyes and had instinctively drawn his hands a little closer about her neck; but she was not prepared for the rush of passion with which he slipped down on his knees beside her chair and crushed her to himself in a complete embrace. She yielded herself without misgiving or reserve; and for the first time, in the first kiss, their lips met. To Rupert the moment was one of ineffable and almost agonizing realization; to her it was like the flinging open of a door into a new untrodden world of passion. In that moment she knew that she had hitherto lived in a twilight of the heart; that beyond this moment lay the sunrise and the morning; and although the transition smote like agony upon her senses, she knew that she would follow him through that perfect and remorseless day, to its noon, to its night. . . .

His lips were devouring her with their kisses, his arms crushing her in their embrace. Suddenly, at some faint sound from beyond the door, he tore him-

self away from her and stood up trembling beside her chair. The sound passed, but the shame and the indignity of the position struck like a cold iron into his soul.

"Celia, Celia," he said brokenly, "my love, my wonderful love, what hell and heaven it is!" and then his voice broke and he put his hands to his eyes.

"I daren't stay now — I would kill you or myself — I will go." And without another word he went suddenly out of the room, careless for once of all appearances, and leaving the explanations to her; found his hat and coat, and stumbled out of the house.

. . . . . .

He was angry with himself; he felt that he had behaved inconsiderately, insanely, and yet he was in the grip of forces beyond his own control. With the wild taste of those first kisses upon his lips, his blood and brain aflame, his instinct was to rush away and be alone, and not to deliver himself over utterly to the elemental forces he had evoked. He walked blindly, hurriedly through the quiet streets of Mayfair till he found himself in Park Lane and walking down towards Piccadilly. The big, silent mansions, the little glittering small houses, seemed to be bending their gaze upon him and saying: "Take it quietly, my friend; you are not the first; this kind of thing goes on in all of us continually; we all do it; these little matters can be arranged. Look into my dining-room, into my drawing-room,

take a peep into this boudoir, come silently into my library. Believe me, you will see yourself and your actions reflected and repeated everywhere."

A drift of cold spray from the fountain at Hamilton Place stung his cheek as he passed, and he turned into Piccadilly. The tide of traffic was running eastward, singing its song of many notes — the whirr and rasp of motor omnibuses, the rushing purr of electromobiles, the rarer clack of the hansoms, and the jingling clatter of omnibuses; and on his left the dark irregular façade of the Clubs, behind which the conventions of the social world sat enthroned, shone with many lighted windows. They seemed to speak to him, like the houses in Park Lane, but in graver tones, and with a shrug of their great gloomy shoulders.

"You are making love to another man's wife! All right; do not tell us anything about it. Do not do anything to press it on our attention. We do it, but it is not done. Trifle and play as much as you please; it is very amusing; but do not be serious, do not be in earnest, do not do anything about which you and we are unable to pretend. It is not only sinful, but it is bad form to take these things seriously. It is not bridge."

He walked on eastward, through the dismal pedestrian throng at the end of Piccadilly, and the dreadful travesty of love and pleasure that displays itself there; on across the garish lights of Leicester Square; brushing, with his golden freight of spiritual emotion, against endless stupidity and uncleanness; on

into the busy Strand and the world of theatres and restaurants — he, and Celia, enclosed within flames in his heart. He walked on and on, the voices in him repeating: "You are in love with another man's wife, another man's wife." All that he had thought or not thought about that situation before seemed utterly meaningless and inadequate. All that other people thought of it seemed suddenly to be invested with a new and tremendous significance. The heartlessness of the world of pleasure, as conventional in its vices as in its virtues, struck him with a new sense of isolation and loneliness; that world could never understand; was from its very nature and the laws that governed it for ever doomed not to understand; must inevitably and infallibly misunderstand. There was no help for him and Celia there.

. . . . . .

From the glare and silent consuming activity of Fleet Street, he turned down to the Embankment and sat down on a bench. The roar still sounded behind him, in the distance; in front of him ran the river with innumerable fleeting footsteps. Poverty and woe shared this world with him; there was no pleasure nor excitement in the narrow region between the benches and the water; things hungry and unhappy came there to be alone. But they were real things; the cough and shiver from the man on the bench beside him had, after all the fret and fever of the lighted town, that touch of sublimity that belongs to misery and death. . . .

Graeme. . . . What about Graeme? How did he stand to Graeme? He saw in imagination Graeme's calm, compact, intelligent face, with its narrow-pointed, carefully-trimmed brown beard — a man who always seemed to have a quiet grip of himself and of any situation in which he might happen to be. But it was not a clear picture; the features of Graeme were blurred and indistinct; Rupert tried to force himself to visualize this man against whose honour he was held to be sinning, but he could not see Graeme as a real person. Graeme sank back into the mists of thought, but Celia's eyes burned through them clearly and reassuringly; the light of truth was in them.

As Rupert's pulses calmed down and his thought grew clearer, he realized, with something like amazement and something like dismay, that he could not feel jealous of Graeme. If Graeme had been cruel or inconsiderate to his wife, or violent or jealous, Rupert thought that his mind would have been easier; the world would have sympathized with him for rescuing Celia from an ogre. But Graeme was a perfect gentleman, and kind and considerate and lovable to Celia; there was no excuse there; he could not get the world on his side that way.

The man on the bench beside him stirred uneasily and broke into a fit of coughing. An old woman, very ragged and thin, shuffled along looking on the ground for some crusts and crumbs that had been dropped from a paper-bag. The world was not on every one's side — why should it be? The world

had its own business, its own aims, its own pleasures. It had very little concern with great things, like misery and death and this burning love of the heart. They were too big for its measuring-rule. He thought of Browning's contrast between the two eternal types of man: —

> "That, has the world here. Should he need the next
> Let the world mind him.
> This, throws himself on God, and, unperplext,
> Seeking, shall find him."

With Rupert, throwing himself on God was equivalent to listening for the inner voice; and the inner voice told him, not a little to his wonderment, that in his love for Celia there was no shame, and that his feelings towards Graeme simply did not exist. He could not think of Graeme in connection with the matter at all, honestly as he tried to; he could not feel that Graeme had anything to do with it, in spite of all the frowning frontages of Piccadilly and Pall Mall.

When he realized this it was as though some stifling canopy that had been smothering the flame in his heart and turning it to smoke and suffocation were lifted off, and the flame rose bright and white and clear. He turned to the man on the bench beside him and spoke some friendly and brotherly words, which made his gift of money a benefit to them both, hailed a passing hansom, and was driven

to his rooms. But before he went to bed — worn out, although it was still early — he sent by hand a little note to Celia, full of passionate love and gratitude and faith in the days to come.

X

A RATHER pressing note from an American collector, who had commissioned a special set of drawings, reminded Rupert that it was absolutely necessary for him to go to Munich at once for a day or two, in order to see the details of a carved ivory cup in the National Museum there, and to make some sketches of the decoration of a certain Greek vase of which he could get no photograph. He liked travelling, and, as a rule, these sudden expeditions were very pleasant to him; but now it seemed almost impossible to leave the country where Celia was, and to withdraw himself from her even for forty-eight hours. He found that with the first kiss of passion he had drunk a new wine which had become necessary to his life; but it was a draught that contained equal parts of bitter and sweet, of bliss and torture. Formerly the days and hours in which he had been absent from her had been filled with the happiness which he had stored up in her presence; now he was miserable when he was away from her, and often in her very presence, with her hand in his or his lips touching her cheek, the knowledge that he must leave her again, that their possession of one

another was still incomplete, chilled and darkened his happiness.

It was characteristic of him that he never thought of giving up this journey, which he felt to be necessary for his work; he was not one to cheat himself with excuses or to pretend that he could put up with a substitute if the original were within reach. But it was equally characteristic of him that he went to Celia, and took her in his arms, and begged her, since he must go to Munich for four days and could not endure to be parted from her for so long, to cut the ties that bound her, and come with him, giving up her existing life then and there at four hours' notice (he was going by the mail that night), and join her life with his, making a beginning at Munich. She half laughed and half cried at him, but when he pressed her she only shook her head in a bewildered sort of way.

"If we ever go, Rupert dear — "

"*If* — " he repeated, looking searchingly into her eyes.

"Well, then, *when* we go," she said, "it won't be like this, bolting like rabbits and scuffling off by a night-train. Rupert, it is so untidy and undignified of people! And besides — "

"Besides what?"

"I don't quite know, but I somehow feel that we have all the world and the whole of life before us if only we are wise and unselfish, and that everything will come to us if we don't grasp at it too greedily. We are not ready yet — we have not earned it."

"How can we earn it? It's one of the things you must do first and earn afterwards."

"Ah, my Rupert!" shaking her head; "it is because you are like that, that I mustn't be also. You can be wise for me, dear one, but I must be wise for you."

Nevertheless the pang of separation, even for a few days, was a very real one, and as Rupert drove back to his rooms he was thinking of the Celia he had left sitting in the house to which her husband would presently return, and he was oppressed by a hundred nameless apprehensions which all his knowledge of her and trust in her could not abate. He had no sooner got home than he sent back a note to her in which he wrote in agonized words of his new terror of the hours of separation. The messenger brought back a comforting, reassuring letter from Celia, and with it a little Italian ring, once her mother's, on the inside of which was engraved the single word "*forse.*" In the letter she said: —

"You need have no fears of the 'midnight hours.' I have come to realize more than most women how impassable are the barriers of the soul, that, in fact, they are the only barriers that are really impassable, and are never even assailed. Remember that you take me with you on every step of your way, that there are no lands and seas between us, that I kiss your hands and your eyes, and that I am for ever and ever your very own."

. . . . . .

Yet, although his heart was warm with love, he had never felt quite so lonely as he felt on that bright spring afternoon, while the train was dragging its tiresome way along the banks of the Rhine, and the endless succession of smoky towns, pepper-pot schlosses and imitation ruins crowning the bluff vine-covered crags rolled past the window in a familiar and disagreeable panorama. He thought it was mere absence from Celia and the fact that he was travelling away from her that made him so unhappy; he had not realized that passionate love is a condition of pain, and of profound dissatisfaction with all sensations except one. But in the twilight, when the muddy stream of the Rhine had been left behind and the train was climbing through the wooded Bavarian uplands, he began to be conscious of the eternal conflict of those great allies of the artist — love and work. That he must live by both, live for both, he knew; and as he felt the tug of love upon his heart-strings, and the quite different thrill in his finger-tips that reminded him of the world of art to which he was hurrying for his work's sake, he wondered dimly what miracle could be wrought by which these two opposing forces could ever be reconciled or made to pull together. Which was the stronger? Love, of course; and yet he was in Bavaria travelling south-east at forty miles an hour, while Celia lay behind him somewhere in the night that was gathering over the north-west, hundreds of miles away.

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He stayed no longer in Munich than was necessary for three visits to the National Museum and the filling of a score of pages in his sketch-book. He went about amid the familiar scenes in a condition in which two extremes of mind were curiously mingled: a state of depression which was partly caused by absence from Celia, and partly, much more than he knew, by the unsatisfactory circumstances of their love; and a sense of exaltation with which he answered this other mood and in which he sought to escape from it. He told himself, and indeed felt with half his nature, that he held the world in the hollow of his hand; that he had attained the great things in life which he had sought; that he was among the Gods and not among the mortals.

Although he was only three days in Munich, he found time to visit one or two shrines; to sit for half-an-hour before the Virgin of Rogier van der Weyden and let its great major triad of blue, rose, and green sink into his soul; to pay his homage to the chorus of colour in the Rubens room that is one of the glories of Munich; and to stand for a moment before the Midas of Nicolas Poussin and confirm once more the rather unusual degree of his admiration of that work. And he found time to wander through the English garden, and to watch the hurrying stream of the Isar, cold and green from its glacier birth, sliding and bustling like a rather furtive alien through the tender April foliage of the garden.

And within a week he was back in London.

XI

Celia had not expected that Rupert would be back so soon, and had arranged to spend the end of the week with a friend in the country; so that Rupert, coming home on Saturday evening, found London empty. Under the circumstances it was unendurable; so he telegraphed to Lady Waynefleete, who was at Gwithian Castle, asking if he might go down to her until Monday. In a couple of hours he had got her answer, and caught the night express to Cornwall.

Just before he left a large parcel was delivered at his flat containing half-a-dozen copies of the "Syrian Songs." He was so busy with his hurried preparations for departure that he had time only for a glance at the beautiful volumes in their bindings of white vellum adorned with his own exquisite design in gold, and to write his name and Celia's in the top one, which he handed to Hicks with instructions that it was to be sent by a special messenger to Mrs. Graeme in the country the first thing in the morning. He took another copy with him for Lady Waynefleete, and departed into the night.

He arrived at Gwithian next morning before his

hostess was downstairs, but he sent a copy of "Syrian Songs" to her by a servant, and then went to have his bath and change. The interest he had taken in the book had to a great extent evaporated; he had hardly any curiosity about it, and while he was dressing he merely opened it and turned the pages quickly over, looking cursorily at his own drawings, but lacking the curiosity to read a line of the poems. The book was exquisitely produced; merely to touch the leaves was a joy; and Rupert remembered with what impatience and excitement he had often looked forward to this moment when he would be able actually to handle it. But all that impatience had disappeared, and when he had seen that the reproductions of his drawings looked well he was satisfied.

Lady Waynefleete presently joined the small party gathered after breakfast in the hall, where Rupert was talking about the culture of asparagus to the solemn Miss Thudichum. There were one or two other people there looking at the papers and making plans for the day, and Lady Waynefleete had to thank him more in looks than in words for the present he had sent her when he arrived. But he thought there was something a little odd in her manner — something as nearly approaching embarrassment as she was capable of showing, and he wondered if it had anything to do with him or if it was merely the result of some small accident in the well-oiled machinery of her house.

Presently she asked him to go to her sitting-room and talk to her, and as soon as they were alone she revealed the cause of her embarrassment.

"My dear Mr. Savage," she began, "I don't know how to thank you for your beautiful book, but may I ask if you have read it?"

Rupert laughed. "No, I don't think I have," he said.

"Looked at it?"

"Well, certainly nothing more than that. Why? Is there anything wrong with it?"

She picked up the white volume, opened it at a certain page, and said: "Read that." It was a poem called "The Rose of Sharon," and was not one of those Rupert had illustrated. As he read it in the presence of Lady Waynefleete, he felt his skin beginning to tingle. He had, in fact, never read anything quite like it before. Its beauty was undeniable, as also were its perversity and corruption. As Rupert read on, he saw that none of his customary arguments about the freedom of art could really excuse anything quite so disagreeable.

"I agree with you," he said, looking up at Lady Waynefleete; "it is deplorable. I wish to goodness now that I had seen it before it was printed, as I might have saved poor Midwood from giving himself away so badly. It is not fair to himself or his own reputation to print stuff like this."

"I am afraid I am profoundly uninterested in Mr. Midwood's reputation," said Lady Waynefleete,

"but I am interested in you and in what people think of you, and it is for your sake that I am concerned about this. I wish it had not happened."

The idea of its connection with him had not occurred to Rupert before, and he brushed it aside now. "I hardly think that anybody will think more or less about my drawing because Midwood is foolish enough to include stuff like this in his work."

"I am not so sure," she said gravely. "The whole thing looks to me very serious. You won't mind my saying that I think some of the poems are quite disgraceful, and that the book should never have been published. I am horrified to think that you are associated with it. Just read these poems through, and I think you will agree with me. Stay here for a few minutes while I go and speak to the housekeeper."

When she had gone, Rupert sat down with a sigh, and read the "Syrian Songs" through from beginning to end. The impression they produced upon him was a singular one. He was first charmed, then interested, then disappointed, then rather revolted, and then, perhaps for the first time in his life, thoroughly shocked. He had never before realized to what a limit the technical perfection of art could be pushed in its association with rank perversity. Midwood had gone out of his way to outrage the taste of the day in its every convention; and yet the result was not destructive and defiant so much as impudent and ugly. For once, and with a vengeance, the emancipated art had over-reached itself.

And as Rupert turned the pages and saw interleaved with them his own beautiful work, he began to realize with a certain sinking of heart in what light his own association with the poems might appear. He had never done better work than he had put into these eighteen perfect pages; the tinge of morbidity that had marked his earlier period was completely absent from them, and sheer beauty of line and conception had taken its place. Yet in their way they fitted wonderfully to the strange and fantastic atmosphere of the poems; he had been so well inspired by Midwood's descriptions that no one would believe that he had never read the verses themselves.

It was a bitter humiliation and disappointment to him that his best work should thus appear as the handmaid of something which, although it was not so contemptible as public opinion would hold it to be, was yet really unworthy. When Lady Waynefleete came into the room again she found him looking very grave indeed. He shut the book up and put it away.

"You are quite right," he said. "This is a horrible blow to me. I don't know what to say or what to do. The whole thing is so complicated. I believe the subscription copies have all gone out, and that a dozen copies were sent to the Press nearly a week ago. It's gone beyond recall. I cannot think how Midwood let himself go like this — he must be mad, and Steinman too."

"Steinman?" said Lady Waynefleete.

"Yes, Freddy Steinman, you know, the brother. He must have seen the poems; he must have known all about it, and be playing some confounded little Jewish game of his own. I suppose that is why he did not want to put his name on it. He knew that if I had seen the poems I would have objected, and so I was never told, and was fool enough not to want to read them until I saw the whole thing complete."

"But surely you knew what kind of a man Mr. Midwood was?" asked Lady Waynefleete. "You know his other work; and although, of course, it is nothing like this, it is tinged with the same kind of thing, and you know what people say about him. My dear Mr. Savage, I make a point of ignoring unpleasant things when I can, and gossip of this kind does not interest me — it is generally untrue; but surely you know what even Mr. Midwood's friends say? I somehow thought you knew all about him."

"In a way I know him very well, and in a way I don't. I believe in his work, I think he is a great poet, and nothing he does of this kind can alter the fact that he has done some of the finest work of his day; and from my point of view that is so much more important than anything else, that I am inclined to ignore his eccentricities. I have never been interested in that side of Midwood, and never come much in contact with it. He has always been a good friend to me, and even now I don't believe he would have published these poems without my seeing them if he had dreamed for a moment that I would ob-

ject. I must think it all out," he continued heavily; "but I do not see that there is very much to be done. You had better burn that beastly book."

"Indeed, I will do no such thing," said Lady Waynefleete. "I prize it very much because you gave it to me, and because of your beautiful drawings. I needn't read the poems if I don't want to. And as you can do nothing until Monday in any case, I forbid you to think any more about it until then, and to try and amuse yourself in this dull place as well as you can."

. . . . . .

But it was not easy for Rupert to put it out of his head. In the middle of some quite ordinary conversation with one of his fellow-guests, he would suddenly be seized with a chill of remembrance, and then grow hot all over with the thought of the kind of thing his name was going to be associated with. A sense grew upon him of impending disaster; he felt almost guilty himself when he realized the extent of the insult which he and Midwood had offered, not only to the public and its Philistine tastes and conventions, but, as he began to think, to literature and art themselves.

He had always been a believer in art of every kind being entirely separated from ideas of morality or immorality, but he realized how in following a similar line, Midwood had become more preoccupied with such ideas than the most Philistine middle-class father of the family could ever be; and that his work, therefore, as well as being profoundly im-

moral, had become profoundly inartistic. He showed his disgust with morality more aggressively even than the ordinary man showed his disgust with freedom of ideas; and on the whole his was the less respectable attitude.

Rupert tried to throw himself into the pursuits of the house, but it was difficult to escape from his own thoughts, and he accepted with relief Lady Waynefleete's proposal to drive him over with her to lunch on Sunday at a neighbouring place where there was a large house party. It was a lovely day, and as they drove over the downs, and the honey-sweet air swept over them in a soft scented billow, the trouble faded a little into the background of Rupert's mind. It all seemed so unreal there on the great lonely sea-scented tableland at the end of England, where few poems had ever been written or read, and where the very echoes of the songs that had been sung had died away centuries before. He was very silent, and Lady Waynefleete, like a good friend, was in sympathy with his mood; so they did not talk much, and he was free to think about Celia, and to remember that he would see her within thirty-six hours. She really filled his heart; she loved him! It was impossible to take anything else very seriously.

They found a large and rather smart party assembled on the lawn at Penhale Abbey — the wonderful ten-acre mown lawn from which you look down over the tops of oak trees on one of the loveliest harbours in England. And almost the first

thing that Rupert saw among the throng of guests was a well-remembered figure, slight and trim and familiar — Lady Fastnet.

As he looked at her, and as he worked his way nearer to her through a succession of introductions, it seemed as though it were only yesterday that he had walked so blindly and miserably out of her house in Dublin; and yet a wider gulf than time seemed to separate him from her and that day from the present.

There was not the least embarrassment in his greeting of her, though he thought there was a strain of shyness in her manner to him. He dispelled that by saying at once: —

"I see you are exactly the same Lady Fastnet, and I am the same Rupert, so we need waste no time in being embarrassed with each other. I have often thought about you in all these years, and only about how kind you were to me, and how good you were for me!"

The old gay smile lighted up the sky-grey eyes and relaxed the severe mouth. "It is very nice of you to say that, Mr. Savage — or may I still call you Rupert? You see everything has come true exactly as we predicted, except that I don't think we ever imagined what giddy heights of genius and fame were in store for us!"

"Oh, please don't let us talk about genius and fame," said Rupert, with a little of his old boyish impatience. "We have talked enough about me to last for a lifetime. You shall tell me about your-

self — a subject I think we rather neglected in the old days."

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They were separated at luncheon, Rupert having to sit between the old and rather deaf Marchioness of Exmouth, who would talk about nothing but improprieties, and her pretty daughter Lady Clementine, who entertained him with a vivid description of her mother being sick on the yacht, and with an extremely witty and artistic survey of sea-sickness in general and other kinds of internal disturbances. In the intervals of this dainty talk he looked across the table sometimes at Geraldine Fastnet, who was dividing herself gracefully between the ardent attention of one of the younger sons of the house and another boy just home from Eton. She was thinking of the years gone by, when the handsome, distinguished-looking man opposite, who was run after by everybody and whose name was famous in two Continents, brought to her feet an admiration and devotion just as boyish as theirs, though perhaps of different quality. And Rupert, when their eyes met in a friendly smile, was feeling how odd it was to be able to look at her without emotion; how strange to be sitting opposite her and not to be fuming because he was not beside her; how wonderful that the same fair face and form that once had meant the whole of life and the world to him should now be without any power even to please or displease him, just because the intangible spirit of love no longer glorified her in his eyes.

It was the same after luncheon when he sought her out again and spent the afternoon walking with her through the wonderful Penhale gardens. He was aware that he only liked her now because she reminded him of his past self. He felt an odd sense of superiority, just because he was no longer in love with her; but she made him feel rather lonely, and filled him with longing for Celia and the sound of Celia's voice. He gathered that her life had not changed much, that she still escaped from Castle Fastnet whenever she could, but that her sense of duty took her there fairly often, to the sole company of her now semi-invalid husband, who refused to leave home and hated to have people staying in the house.

She made it clear to Rupert that while his life had so gloriously grown and developed, hers had stood still. He would have liked to be kinder to her, to be fonder of her, to be more absorbed in her than he was; but he was painfully aware that he had outgrown her, and he hated himself for seeing it. He was afraid that she had formerly taken possession of his youthful imagination simply because she was strange and new, and unlike anything he had known; now he knew her type well, and she had no interest for him. She had lost her understanding of him, too; she was a little afraid of him and of his fearless, unconventional views of life and conduct; she felt a little like a mother whose child has grown up and left the home; she would have called him back if she could, but she knew that he would

never again come to her call. She summed up her limited comprehension of him in a pathetic little epigram: "You approve of good women, and rather pity them." He knew then that he could never make her understand what he thought about women.

These rather painful discoveries along the forsaken trail of an old sentiment occupied his mind, at any rate, for the afternoon, and kept his thoughts from brooding on the forthcoming trouble connected with the book. Lady Waynefleete on the drive home was rewarded for her silence in the morning by a brisk and high-spirited conversation, in which Rupert's quick, intelligent and humorous mind was at its best and gayest.

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But he came back to reality the next morning. He went up by the early train, and got the London papers at Plymouth. He turned one over after another, and was relieved to find no mention of the "Syrian Songs" in the first half-dozen; but as he opened *The Messenger,* that great organ of English middle-class opinion, his eye was caught by a big headline in the middle of the front page. He settled grimly down to read an ably-written and weighty denunciation that filled a column and a half.

It was worse even than he had thought; there was no question of dismissing the book with contempt; the writer of the article invited public attention to it, referring to the manner of its publication as being likely to provide a kind of screen for it, and warning his readers that they had a duty in

the matter of works of this kind, although they were on subjects which might not as a rule come within the range of their interest. There was a personal bitterness and rancour underlying the article, which, although it was well concealed, added to the intensity and scorn of the indictment. There was no attempt to separate Rupert and Midwood or to discriminate between them; most unfairly their work was lumped together and treated as the deliberate collaboration which it appeared to be, and indeed ought to have been.

Rupert had had some vague idea, more for the sake of his friends than for his own sake, of asking Midwood to explain that the drawings had been made quite independently for the poems; but he felt that that was impossible now. He must stand by Midwood and take his share of the responsibility for the thing which bore their two names.

The writer of the article ended his powerful and passionate denunciation of what he called uncleanness in art by an appeal to public opinion against the whole of the group of whose work, as he said, a book like this was the inevitable blossom. He demanded its instant suppression, and hinted that the prosecution of the publishers (who were also the authors) might afford a wholesome example; in any case he promised his readers that the matter should not be allowed to rest so far as the influence of his paper was concerned.

The effect of all this upon Rupert was to make him feel rather sick. In one way, and only in one

way, he was on the side of the writer; he had shared the feelings of repulsion with which he had evidently read the poems. But, on the other hand, he felt dumbly the gross injustice to which his own perfectly sound work was subjected in being looked at through the light of Midwood's moral eccentricity. He was jealous for his work and for his reputation, and wanted to save them from any association likely to be damaging; and here he had deliberately placed them in a false and degrading position. It was horrible.

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He telegraphed to Caird and Sibley asking them urgently to dine with him. Caird came first and greeted Rupert heartily. "Well, it has come, my friend," he said; "I hope you are ready for it."

"What has come?" asked Rupert.

"Fame, success, the pinnacle of fame — and likewise the end of all that. There will be some dust and trouble, and then you can settle down to work in earnest; but the bubble is pricked, I am afraid."

"Do you think it's going to be serious?"

"I do," said Caird. "The English people have very few ideas, but they have very definite ones. They like impropriety, provided you wrap it up in a blanket of sentiment, and they will stand an attack on their religion provided it is delivered by a strict ascetic moralist; but a man who mixes up religion and immorality, and lays unclean hands on New Testament history, they have no mercy upon. And I don't know but what they are right. They don't

believe in much, but they have a fine sense of reverence in what they do believe in, and they don't want their temples defiled. Which of us does?"

"There is a storm brewing," said Sibley, who had joined them in Rupert's rooms; "and I think we shall all be in it. There are certain things, as you say, that the dear British Public will not stand at any price, and Midwood seems to have thought of them all. Did *no one* see these poems, Rupert?"

"Not a soul, except perhaps Freddy Steinman, and even he, if he had an inkling of what they were like, I expect made a point of not seeing them. Where is he, by the way?"

"Hiding," said Sibley.

"We must smoke him out," said Rupert, "and yet — the beastliness of the whole thing is that one can't do anything. I can't thrash Steinman, because the little beast hasn't done anything to deserve it. He has acted according to his lights. It is I who have been the fool. Has any one seen Midwood?"

"No," said Sibley, "and from what I hear no one is likely to. He has vanished. I am afraid there will be an awful row."

"I confess I do not think the poems are very good; but I see what you mean about the extraordinarily infuriating effect they will have; also Midwood's life won't very well bear prying into."

"When they realize what he has done," said Caird, "they will lynch him if they can catch him. Man, Rupert, you are a grand hand at the drawing, but I doubt you are no very great hand at managing

your own affairs. Well, it will be a fine thing for you all the same — just a clean sweep of all the gilt and tinsel out of your life, and nothing left but your real friends and your work."

"They can't do very much to me," said Rupert, a little defiantly. "They can say I am tarred with the same brush, but they can't make it true if it is not."

"No," said Caird, "maybe they cannot do much, but they can do just this, and they will do it — put you under a moral ban and ignore you. I may be exaggerating what's in the air, but I don't think so. If I am right, the whole of your work will be so identified with Midwood's downfall that, for a time at least, no publisher will publish it, and no editor who has a magazine will buy one of your drawings, and they will be kept in the back-rooms and locked cases of the picture shops. Your name won't be mentioned in polite society," added Caird, with a grin. "Man, it's a disgrace to England, but it's splendid for you!"

"Well, we shall see," said Rupert. "I think, perhaps, you are wrong, but we shall see."

XII

Celia Graeme was sitting in her room, a white vellum book before her, and on it a note from Rupert asking if he might come to lunch that day as he had something important to tell her. Her brows were knitted; she was trying to think out a difficult problem with the calm deliberation of mind that she brought to all the affairs of her inner life; but she was really puzzled. She had had two days to consider the book and all that it might mean. She was aware of the strange chance that had prevented Rupert from knowing about the poems before it was published, and her whole heart was going out to him and sharing the mortification and misery which she knew he must be feeling. She had looked upon the book, certainly upon his share of it, as a child of his and hers; her eagerness in looking forward to its appearance had been even greater than his; she knew how good his work in it was, and she had felt a very real though quiet pride in the fact that he had done his best work in intimate association with her. And now it was all spoilt, and worse than spoilt, by this horrible accident that had turned what ought to have been the means of increasing his

reputation and good fame before the world into a means of degradation and something like disgrace.

Midwood's poems puzzled rather than disgusted her. She was not sure she understood all their veiled, erotic allusiveness, but her instinct rejected them as something not sound or true to life and art. She was for the first time in her life a little frightened — not for herself, but for Rupert. What effect would it have upon him? She wanted above all things to be with him; she knew that he must be full of anxiety to talk to her about the situation; she had seen the scathing denunciation in *The Messenger,* and there were two equally indignant and damning reviews that morning in papers which had not before noticed the book.

Her husband came into the room while she was still thinking, and she gave him Rupert's note, which consisted of only a few formal lines.

"Poor Rupert," she said. "He must be terribly distressed about this, and want to talk about it."

Her husband sat down on a chair beside her. He read the note and then looked up.

"I wanted to speak to you about that, Celia. I did not say anything last night after you showed me the book, because I wanted to think it over. I am afraid you cannot have Rupert Savage to lunch to-day."

"My dear Charles," she said, surprised, "why in the world not?"

Graeme looked down at the floor, his mouth firmly set.

"Simply because it is impossible at present, while this horrible scandal is in the air, that you should identify yourself with any one connected with it. I am very sorry; I know how it will hurt you to appear disloyal to your friends, but I have to think about you first. I cannot tell you how perfectly hateful and odious this business is. You don't know the whole of it. You don't know what people are saying. About Savage, of course, it is not true, but it is true about the other man. It is painful for me even to talk to you about it. I wish you not to see anything of Rupert Savage until it has settled itself in some way."

"But this is nonsense. If there is any trouble, if people are going to be unjust and say nasty things about Rupert, that is the very time his friends must stand by him. I could no more write telling him not to come than I could believe any wild nonsense people like to say about him."

"Then I must write, if you won't," said Graeme firmly; "perhaps it would be better. I do not care for you even to be discussing the thing with him. It is the one kind of thing which one cannot allow a woman to appear to be even faintly involved in."

Celia was silent for a minute, thinking rapidly. Not for years had her husband ever assumed that he had the right to command her in any matter connected with her friends; but she was not thinking of that. She knew him well enough to realize that having once taken up a position of this kind and having assumed his right to control her movements,

he would not recede from it. As they sat silent in the room there together the external affection and goodwill that held them together as good friends for so many years seemed to vanish, and the profound native antagonism of their natures stood in its place. She felt that she was being forced into a position in which some very definite action would be required of her; she had felt it coming for some time, but now it had been precipitated, and the moment had arrived before she was ready for it.

She rebelled against being hurried or bustled into a decision, and she tried to gain time by an attempt to alter her husband's point of view by deprecating the importance which he attached to the whole incident. But it was of no use. Graeme had made up his mind, and she felt that he would never alter it. She did not know how much he suspected of Rupert's attachment to her; he was a very silent man, and even secret about such things; all she knew was that he had no idea that a deep and passionate love had been awakened in her soul, and she remembered how completely he had misunderstood her on that strange occasion when she had been prompted to tell him of it.

She had felt then as if Fate had intervened to prevent her making a decision, and she had the same feeling now. Obviously she could not ask Rupert to her husband's house if he forbade it; obviously also it was entirely against her nature to resort to any clandestine method of seeing him; and if she saw him openly she knew Graeme well enough to

understand that it would mean an absolute break with him. And she did not feel that the moment had come for that, either for her sake or Rupert's. She felt that if by yielding to his persuasions and running away with him she involved him in a social scandal as well as in this other trouble, it would probably have such a disastrous effect upon his career that he would never recover from it. And she loved him far too well and too deeply to let her love be a curse to him.

Often in these last weeks she had felt that she would give anything to end her present unreal life and begin a real one with him; she was so weary of not being herself; so weary of the interminable masquerade that had been tolerable enough and had seemed as well worth doing as anything else, before her love had been awakened. The whole woman in her, body and soul, longed to run to the mate who was calling to her; and yet she had held back, and for his sake. The reasons why she should hold back were still there; she must not, no, she must not let any other circumstance force her into an action which she did not do freely and of her own choice.

Graeme got up to go. "You quite understand, Celia, I am sure, and you will do what I wish."

Celia rose also from her chair. "No, I cannot write a letter like that, if that is what you mean. I disapprove of it and I won't do it."

"Very well then, I will do it for you; it will be better. The whole thing will blow over, I dare say; but until it does I cannot have you involved in it,"

he added kindly, and stooping down to put his hand on hers.

She drew it away quickly, looking at him with a curious detached expression in her eyes. She could see that he was offended and in a way exasperated with her; but he only showed it by an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, and left the room. He went to his study and wrote a rather formal and quite definite note to Rupert, saying that he was sure he would not misunderstand him when he said that he thought it would be better, while this deplorable business lasted, that his wife should not be identified in any way with people connected with it; and he hoped that when it was all over they would see Rupert again as they had been accustomed to do. And then he departed to a Directors' Meeting with a rather satisfactory sense of having done something unpleasant but necessary, and of having asserted his right to protect Celia from her indiscretions.

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Celia sat thinking for a long while in her chair. The one thing she was sure of was her absolute and changeless love for Rupert; that would be the one thing he was sure of also. Therefore he could not possibly misunderstand this characteristic action of her husband. The one thing above all others she wished to preserve was her power of being of use to him, and the one thing endangering that would be an open disagreement about him. A remarkable candour of mind made it impossible for her, after

what her husband had said, to write without telling him; to tell him would be to precipitate a situation that she wished, for Rupert's sake, to postpone; therefore she would not write. Rupert would understand; but oh, what would she not have given to have been able to run to him then and there and put her arms round him, and wrap him in a mantle of love that would protect him from all the pain and unpleasantness that was threatening him!

She seemed to herself to be living in a dream; an hour ago she would have said that complete passivity on her part, while her husband was showing the conventional white feather at the breath of scandal, and making her seem to desert her friend in danger, would have seemed impossible to her; but the inner voice, and that strange fate that had intervened once before, told her to wait and choose her own time and not be deflected by accident or circumstances. She turned to a volume beside her in which she had often found, when it was to be found nowhere else, a silent encouragement in her effort always to make her decisions in life the decisions of deliberate choice, and she found a passage that had been the expression of her whole belief since first she had discovered the road of her soul.

"The thing that thou actually lovest, choose that, even as thou art minded; it is the voice of thy whole being that speaks then. Paint that, sing it, celebrate it, work towards doing it and possessing it, deaf towards all else. It is rich with blessedness for thee;

every feature and figure of it emblematic of good to thee; it is thy counterpart, that."

Work towards possessing it — that was what she had to do for Rupert, and he for her. But there was so much work still to do, and it was that most weary and difficult labour of the soul — the work of waiting, the work of silence, the work of risking misjudgment, the work of suffering and even inflicting pain in order that a greater joy might be fulfilled. She took up Rupert's photograph and looked long at the well-modelled, masterful face; and her eyes filled with unwonted tears.

XIII

Rupert found two letters waiting for him the next morning — one in the unfamiliar writing of his cousin Helen and bearing the Malvern post-mark. He opened it first. It told him briefly that his aunt, who had been staying there for a cure, had been taken dangerously ill the day before, and that, although there seemed to be no immediate danger, it was thought better that Rupert should come to her at once, in case of any sudden development of her illness.

In the midst of other pre-occupations this news had a doubly chilling effect; but when he opened the other letter the writing, which he recognized as Graeme's, went dim before his eyes. For a moment he was completely stupefied; his mind was more wrought upon than he knew by all the events that had been crowding upon it; and this formal conventional message, with its veiled suggestion that he was a person association with whom might bring trouble even upon his friends, struck him with a blow like that of a leaden bullet. And the blow, although it did not come from Celia, came from her direction.

It was a few minutes before he could clear his thoughts sufficiently to realize that something tremendous must have happened for her even to allow him to be subjected to this slight. The deadly thing in his mind was that she had allowed some one else to write her answer for her; the significance of such an action, its rudeness even, all that it might be intended to convey under ordinary circumstances, struck him as being utterly at variance with what he knew of Celia's character and actions. He was thinking entirely of himself; he had been supported by the certainty of seeing her that day, counting upon it, leaning upon it with his whole heart and soul, and now it was struck away from under him by an utterly inexplicable action. His brain was in a ferment. He walked up and down the room with his heart thumping like a sledge-hammer, trying to understand, trying to see. He could not see, he could not understand; it was all quite blurred and dark. . . .

Mechanically he picked up one of the two papers that had been put on his table, and opening it saw that there was another long article about the "Syrian Songs," and also that the columns had been opened to a correspondence on the subject. He read the article first; it was the kind of thing he was getting accustomed to; but it had even more weight and rancour than that in *The Messenger*. It reviewed the past work of Midwood and Rupert, making light of its artistic worth and tracing through it a tendency that had inevitably led to decadence

and perversion. This tendency, said the article, must be stopped at all costs; and its stoppage would be purchased cheaply indeed at the cost of a few reputations and careers. The article was followed by a column and a half of extremely violent and sometimes hysterical letters from various good souls who were moved by the articles in the papers; and, understanding that morality and religion and social cleanness were being subverted, manfully took pen in hand on a theme on which at last they felt they could speak with knowledge, and added to the general chorus their shrill cries of indignation and anger.

There was no weight in most of the letters, which represented the yelping of hounds on a trail; but to see one's self called names, and not nice names, and to see one's self abused throughout the columns of a newspaper, has a certain effect. For Rupert it was merely one in a procession of calamities that were beginning to weigh upon him with a sense of irretrievable disaster. The whole world was slipping away from him.

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He had forgotten the news about his aunt; as he picked up his cousin's letter again he remembered it dimly as something that had happened a long time ago. He would have to go to Malvern, and that was the only thing left to be done. That meant leaving London and Celia. Celia! For the first time in his life the thought of her was associated with pain and torture. At one moment he was on

the point of rushing from the room straight to her house, insisting on seeing her and hearing from her own lips that she loved him, trusted him, knew him, stood by him; next he threw himself into his chair with his head sunk on his hands trying to stop the whirling in his brain and to disentangle some clear thought there. Then he remembered again that he must go to Malvern; and he looked up the trains and decided to go early in the afternoon.

He had been so much on the move lately that most of his affairs had been neglected. He had to go out to see one or two people on business, and to attend to some of the dull mechanical details of existence. He walked up St. James's Street and along Piccadilly with the thought of Celia throbbing in his head. The temptation to go to Curzon Street was almost irresistible, but the cold barrier of that note was impassable. Then he thought he might perhaps meet Celia. The idea that she might be out and near him, and that he by some lack of vigilance might miss her, sent him into Bond Street and Regent Street, to the quarter in which women are supposed to be when they are shopping; and he saw many beautiful women going in and out of shops, and had several sudden flutterings of the heart when he saw what looked like a familiar carriage and coachman; but he saw no Celia.

He saw one or two other people, however, whom he knew, and thought that they were a little dull sometimes in not seeing him. Then with a bitter smile he realized that recognition of him was being

actually avoided. He was beginning to understand that fame is a two-edged weapon, which remains in the ownership of the world that granted its use and can take it back again. If it had given Rupert a sense of power over the world, he realized now that it was giving the world power over him.

He was inclined to laugh when he was deliberately cut in St. James's Street by a man at whose house he had dined and whose daughters he had danced with through the last season. But when he went to his club, which he did with the deliberate intention of testing the extent of this feeling, he found it difficult to laugh any more. There was an air of coldness and aloofness there which was far more depressing than deliberate insult. He saw the sidelong glances directed at him from behind newspapers, but the eyes did not meet his with the usual readiness; there was a fidgety air in the smoking-room while he was in it; the men he spoke to seemed guilty and embarrassed, and one or two were rather too polite. He soon had enough of the Club. He had learned what he wanted to know there.

He was more stung and humiliated than he cared to admit; he began to see and to know that justice has not necessarily any part in the world's punishments, to realize what a very small matter it made whether a man was innocent or guilty in the eyes of those who condemned him, and to feel that in that silent, threatening attitude of the public there was weight as well as bitterness.

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He reached Malvern that evening, and found that his aunt was not expected to live more than a day or two at the most. In his present condition he was hardly capable of feeling any more grief; in fact, he was almost ashamed when he realized how little he felt as he sat by the bedside and watched the frail old life beating itself away.

It was a mere ghost of himself that sat there. In imagination his real self was far away, wandering in some voiceless darkness in search of his hidden love; he was like a blind, lost soul searching through the endless night of doubt and separation for its mate. The last few hours in London, moreover, had given a tinge of bitterness to his depression; and in that moment of distress and weakness, suspicion — the foul bird that comes to prey upon a weakening faith — entered his heart. His certainty of Celia's love for him began to waver; since his reason could furnish him with no explanation of her silence, and his wounded pride was too sensitive to ask for it, he began to sink back into the mire of mistrust. It was impossible that she could be like the rest of the world, but the fact was that she had failed him, and that nothing could explain or alter or make up for that.

The next morning his aunt was no better, but not much worse. The doctor thought it likely that she might live, at the outside, for three or four days; but in her semi-conscious state there were intervals in which she seemed to recognize Rupert and to like to hold his hand as he sat by her bedside. It was

all he could do for her; it was such a little return for all the love and care she had lavished upon him, and he felt that he must stay with her until the end. The devoted cousin Helen, a lady of rather negative character, much immersed in the affairs of her own home, from which she had been so long absent, had been Miss Savage's only companion for some months; she was practically her only other living relation, and Rupert could not leave his post. But it was an added torture to sit there for hours at a time in the dark room, waiting for an end that came so slowly and gradually that the downward progress was almost imperceptible.

He remembered how on that winter evening years ago he had sat with her so impatiently waiting for her to go to bed, in order that he might set out on the glowing road of life that was calling him. And here he was, apparently at another turning-point in his life, again waiting for the poor old lady to retire into that long night from which there is no waking. But he was not impatient this time; he would have kept her if he could, for he was beginning to feel that his world was crumbling away, and that he was friendless and alone. But in another way he was glad that she had been spared any knowledge of the catastrophe, which, although she would never have doubted him, would have caused her the deepest grief and shame on his account.

In the meantime the papers came to him and he was able, like a spectator a long way off, to watch the growing storm in which his name had become

involved. *The Messenger,* true to its promise, came out with a long, brilliantly-written indictment of the whole of the modern movement in art — an indictment based on moral more than artistic grounds. Rupert had heard in town some unpleasant story about a son of the editor who had been an intimate friend of Midwood's and had come to utter moral grief; and there was a certain nobility in the hatred and indignation with which every line of the article was inspired. But again there was no discrimination. Although the rancour was all inspired by Midwood, it was directed equally against Rupert and the others; the article was a flaming accusation that rang like a bugle call through the newspaper world of England; and all the smaller hounds were in full cry. The correspondence columns were filled with moral protests; it turned out that Midwood's moral twist had after all not been expressed in his writing alone, but that it had brought his private life within reach of the law. It was eagerly demanded that he should be prosecuted and made an example of; but he had evidently received a hint in time and had fled the country, no one knew whither.

And on the following Sunday the Bishop of Penzance, preaching in Westminster Abbey, solemnly warned England against the tendencies of modern art, denounced the "Syrian Songs" as an example of it that must be revolting to every Christian man and woman, and demanded that those who thus defiled the temple of art should be scourged from its precincts.

The last insult of all came in the shape of the current number of *The Riddle,* which reached Rupert a few hours before his aunt died. The front page was to have contained a drawing by him — a very simple but exquisite little study called "Spring," of a child sitting in a meadow starred with flowers. But when he opened *The Riddle,* instead of this innocent composition, which might have done something to remind people of the wrongness and injustice of their denunciation of him, Rupert saw a blank page with a small line of print in the middle of it: "A line drawing by Mr. Rupert Savage had been prepared for this page, but in view of recent events the publishers decided to withdraw it, although they were unable at such short notice to procure a suitable drawing from another artist."

So that was Steinman's point of view; he had deserted like the others. He had thought to preserve the existence of his paper by offering up one of his men as a sacrifice, and he had chosen Rupert; and that blank page, suggesting unutterable things of him in the paper which his own genius had practically created, was in some ways the deepest insult of all.

But he had to turn from considering these things to take his aunt's hand in his for the last time, for the last time to lay his lips on her forehead, and to see her die.

XIV

The Irish night-mail swung through the Potteries and sped over the flats of Cheshire, and the people in its long line of coaches dozed or waked, or rested or were wearied, according to the state of their nerves. Rupert Savage, in a compartment by himself, slept fitfully. The steady rushing of the train along the low Flintshire coast lulled him for a time into a grateful oblivion; then the deafening roar and clatter over Conway Bridge waked him suddenly, and it was perhaps a second or two before the upholstered arms of the cushions, the trembling shaded lamp, and the reflection of his own startled, haggard face in the black window brought him back to consciousness of the train and what it meant at that moment.

Hicks, his servant, came in from the corridor to see if he wanted anything, and to tell him that they would be at Holyhead in about half-an-hour, and, having arranged a rug, went out again. And Rupert settled himself back into the corner of his carriage, thinking wearily.

He deliberately diverted his thoughts from Celia and occupied them with the strange unwonted er-

rand that he was now upon. The incidents of the past few days passed rapidly before his mind — the summons to Malvern, the long waiting by the bedside, the double life of attendance upon a sick old woman, and endurance of the inner storms and conflicts of the lover and the artist; the paralyzing effect upon him of Celia's silence and apparent failure; the tremendous tide of public fury and indignation that had been set flowing against him; the death and quiet passage of his aunt from out all things transitory and sublunary; the writings, telegrams, petty arrangements (his cousin having been summoned to her own home by illness there); dealings with strange black-coated beings who seemed suddenly to have invaded his life; his brief return to London and wounded avoidance of all acquaintances; hurry, worry, occupation with endless detail — and now this flying midnight journey across England towards the land and place of his birth. For somewhere in the long, hurrying train there was an unlighted coach with one silent occupant, who slept unbrokenly through stoppages and shuntings, over rivers and through cuttings and tunnels — his aunt, who had so often complained of the journey between England and Ireland, now hurried uncomplainingly on her last home-coming.

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Beside the constant misery that ached in his heart there was another sense as of one taking part in a drama. He had been amazed at how little he was able to feel concerning the illness and death of

his aunt; and even now he realized his utter detachment from the old woman whose corpse rested in the van. She had latterly been very little to him. She had taken no part — could have taken no part — in the splendour of his fame and achievement. With the self-absorption and unconsciousness of all growing things he had been moving away from the supports of his early youth; and a very small portion of his life and thoughts had been given latterly to his aunt. He felt very far away from her and her concerns; very far even from this last concern of hers; it was all like a dream, or a play in which he had to act a part. And as the lights of Holyhead appeared, and the train drew up by the harbour, and the strong smell of the sea greeted his nostrils, it was with a sense not of actuality but of remote fantasy that he got down on to the wooden platform and prepared to go across to the steamer.

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His sense of drama was greatly assisted by the appearance at the carriage door of Mr. Clod, the master of those dismal ceremonies with which we honour our dead. This creature had so interwoven himself into Rupert's life during the past few days that, amid all this tragedy, he had come to have an almost comic sense of reliance on him. The undertaker was a bulky man, dressed by an admirable tailor, whose massive head and weathered face suggested a blend of ambassador and sea captain. Discretion and diplomacy were the gifts which had brought him to eminence in his profession; he was

a past-master in the art of enveloping his clients in a vast and intricate ritual, and then cutting a way out for them with one sweep of his powerful and diplomatic arm; just as, when he made up his fantastic bills, he was accustomed to add fifty per cent. to the amount, and then, when the long-suffering executor came to protest, to say, with a confidential air: "Just leave this to me, will you? It seems a great deal — I do not think you ought to pay so much — I will see that they strike off thirty per cent. at least." He loved his profession; he was like a Chamberlain at a Court whose sovereign was the Body, the crown prince and heir apparent the chief mourner, and the minor royalties the relatives and friends; while his own highly-trained staff were household and bodyguard in one.

As Rupert emerged from the carriage he found Mr. Clod standing bareheaded by the door. It was one of the undertaker's rules always to uncover in the presence of mourners — his royal family; also always to assume that they were suffering from an agonizing and prostrating grief — which quite often they were not. He now stepped forward, and addressed Rupert in tones of deep sympathy.

"All ready, Mr. Savage. I've had a bit of the platform railed off, so as to have no crowding." For some reason the Greenore steamer was late in leaving that night; and in any case the small hours of the morning on the Holyhead platform are not productive of great crowds, and the passengers had already gone across to the steamer; but it was one

of Clod's beliefs that the world consisted of an unruly crowd trying to get a sight of the Body. "If you'll follow me, Mr. Savage, I'll see that you're not annoyed. When you're ready, sir. This way."

Mr. Clod moved in front of Hugh across the empty platform as though he were insinuating himself to clear a path through a dense throng. Still keeping Rupert behind him, he hurried to the closed van, where a line of his menials was drawn up. In obedience to a succession of brisk muscular movements on the part of Clod — dumb words of command — they opened the door of the van, drew out the coffin, shouldered it, and (still taking the time from Clod) marched across to the steamer. Hugh, with his hat in his hand, and Hicks behind him, and strange, confused thoughts in his mind, followed across the planks, up the gangway of the steamer, where the officers were standing bareheaded. A few more shufflings and staggerings and whispered orders, and the ropes were cast off, and the steamer was threading her way through the maze of lighted buoys towards the South Stack.

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It was a quiet May night, and there were few passengers; the fresh sea air had chased away Rupert's sleepiness; and he watched the darkness of the night sky changing to a mysterious blue gloom, in which the lighted buoys of the channel and the arc lamps behind hung like stars of silver and gold, and the quick upward flash of the lighthouse looked

like arms thrown up to the sky in a dumb appeal for help as the radiance of the light was quenched in the growing dawn.

Rupert walked up and down the almost empty deck, watching the world of bright pin-point lights receding in the distance. The novelty of his situation and the queer, unreal solemnity of his errand set thought and memory working in his mind. At one end of his short walk there was a roped-off space, containing a rectangular object covered with tarpaulins; at the other, two glowing cigar-ends under the lee of a deck-house showed where Mr. Clod had for the moment put off his greatness, and was condescending to converse with Hicks. For the expansive, good-natured creature must have some one to be agreeable to — if not a mourner or a relative, then a mourner's servant; and in such moments as these — the human part of him seeking utterance — the pomp of the man was put aside. As Rupert turned in his walk fragments of their conversation — the strange, unfamiliar talk of servants at their ease — broke on his hearing; at the other end it was inaudible, and there were only the surges and the beat of the engines to be heard.

He would have said that he was thinking; but thought is an active matter, and his mind was passive, filled with floating pictures and sensations. His aunt — he could not, think as he might, identify her in any way with the admirable piece of cabinet-making under the tarpaulin. That seemed to belong much more to Clod than to him. She was away

somewhere in the dim past — in the house by the shore at Rathshene, now in a dark, cool pantry, odorous to his childish nostrils of Arabian spices, now in the hot walled garden, where the noise of the rooks in the demesne hard by drowned the roar of the tide.

". . . at Plymouth, when I was an apprentice" (it was the voice of Clod), "I remember one case — a very stout gentleman he was, too — a byword for stoutness. Very hot weather we had that summer, too, and there was no time to get a lead shell nor even a zinc tray. I had to act on the spot. What did I do? Why, packed the corpse round with sawdust; and even then — "

The voice faded, but it had broken the spell. The scroll of pictures in his mind had been changed. It was London now, and the long grey walls of his room; all the toil and labour that had gone to the making of himself there; the success, the appreciation, the praise, the feasting, the brilliant, restless, feverish atmosphere of his world, of whose trinity the three persons were Art, Beauty and Wit. . . . Celia's room; Celia's grave, calm face, lovely and tender in its pure modelling, and the violet, gem-like shining of her eyes — ah! there was pain in that memory, and he turned away from it too.

The salt air blew cold upon him, and he decided to go to his cabin and get an hour or two's sleep in preparation of the long day before him. He stood for a moment looking over the surging waters grown greyer and bluer in the paling gloom of dawn.

There was a dawn of something in his heart — a chill and lonely dawn.

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He was awakened by Hicks, who drew the curtain and let daylight stream into his state-room. "We've been in nearly an hour, sir, and Mr. Clod says we ought to start in half-an-hour."

"All right, Hicks; have my breakfast ready in twenty minutes."

When he came on deck Greenore Harbour was bright with morning sunshine; but the foreground of the view was darkened by Mr. Clod, who stood in his graveside attitude, with hunched shoulders, brooding like a plump raven over the packing-case that had been swung on to the pier. The horses and conveyances had been sent from Belfast — a hearse and two carriages, with an attendant vehicle, like a holiday wagonette disguised in black paint, destined to conceal the wayside cheerfulness of the mutes. As Rupert came down the gangway the undertaker turned to him with sympathetic inquiries after his short sleep.

"Over thirty miles, I think you said, sir?" he asked in a melancholy voice. "Time we were making a start." The man looked wretchedly ill. Set off by the rich hanging folds of his black garments and faultless linen, the mottled red of his face looked unwholesome — though really it was wholesome enough, being but weathered by the winds on many bleak cemetery slopes. His pale eyes, half closed

between swollen lids, looked suffused as though with weeping; though they too were well enough, pale like a seaman's from looking into gales, and a little watery from the effect of cordials taken to keep out the graveside damp. A touch of sleeplessness, as in the present case, had an admirable effect; and on the vigil of a very important funeral Mr. Clod made it a habit not to go to bed until very late. He looked so ill that Rupert noticed it.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Clod?" he asked kindly. "You don't look well."

An expression of frank astonishment for a moment enlivened the lugubrious features. "*Me* ill, sir!" he gasped. Obviously the idea had never occurred to him; but he quickly suppressed his unseemly surprise.

"Oh, don't trouble about me, I beg, sir. It's *you* we must think of; you have a trying day before you, Mr. Savage, and I do hope that strength will be given you to bear up. Excuse my mentioning it, sir, but being so much with you the last few days, and travelling like this together, has made me feel almost like one of your household. I assure you, sir, I feel the loss, in my humble way, as a personal one." And a genuine tear hovered on Clod's pale eye, and had rolled halfway down Clod's mottled cheek before it was caught and absorbed in Clod's large handkerchief.

Rupert gazed in astonishment at the picture of a man crying for the loss of some one he had never seen alive; and then a sense of the huge, balloon-

like plausibility and self-deception of the creature came to him so suddenly that he could hardly help laughing in Clod's dismal face. The man was actually sincere; he had so prepared his emotions that he could sow the seeds and reap the harvest of grief in a single night.

"All right, thank you, I'll manage," he replied. "I think I'll have the carriage open; there's no need to be covered up all the way. And let them drive at a good pace, please, Mr. Clod, or we shall never get there. Of course, you can go slowly through the villages."

Clod received these secular instructions with a grieved, sympathetic air, as one might listen to the extravagant requests of a person whose mind was unhinged by sorrow. "Everything shall be done as you wish, Mr. Savage. I think we are ready now."

With these words he ceased to be the sympathetic body-servant and became the general again. "I think we are ready now — " the words were the motif of his life, spoken while he peeped out of darkened bedrooms, or tiptoed into drawing-rooms, or hovered in the porches of churches, or hastily concealed the screw-driver in his capacious pocket. He now hurried off to his bodyguard, who lifted the coffin out of its case and raised it on their shoulders. Hat in hand, he waved off the few harbour loiterers and walked slowly round the coffin, apparently engaged in prayer, but really uttering a series of sharp exhortations in a savage undertone.

"Now, Johnson, shoulders! Evans, straighten

out there — your corner's down. Where's your collar, Ryles? Left it in the train? You'll leave your trousers in the train next. That's a fine, anyway. Now then! one, two." And the little procession moved to the hearse. Rupert seated himself in the open carriage, Clod and Hicks took possession of the next, the black brigade mounted into their wagonette, and the cavalcade passed out through the town of Greenore into the open country beyond.

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The air was sweet and fragrant; the smell of green Ireland on that early May morning came familiarly to Rupert's sense, as, having substituted a travelling cap for his hat, he leaned back on the cushions and watched the fair country unrolling before him. The hedgerows, in their first glory of colour and perfume, reminded him of those wonderful variations in the symphony of green that only Irish hedgerows can invent; he began to feel that he was on his native soil and wondered that he had so long been an exile from it. The whole circumstances of the moment were so unusual and so unreal that they imposed themselves upon his attention and relieved the dull monotony of misery in his thoughts. How odd it was that he should be driving along an Irish road on an early May morning, alone with a valet and an undertaker! There was no one else to come. The few people who, in the light of recent events, he could still regard as his firm friends — people like Caird, Sibley, or Lady Waynefleete, would have been oddly out of place in this scene and

would only have marked the wideness of the difference that lay between his world in London and this old world of childhood. They would have been uncomfortable; they would hardly have understood his own feeling about it or about his aunt's death, half an indifference, half a shy, unreasonable sensitiveness. Nor would the Rathshene people have understood his friends or their attitude towards him. In Rathshene he very well knew he would only be "Master Rupert," his father's son, his aunt's nephew. People's minds there dwelt in the past, and they probably realized not at all, and would have cared very little if they had realized the unique position that "Master Rupert" had come to hold in the large world. It was probable that they had never heard of *The Riddle;* he hoped they never had.

The morning air, after its first stimulating effect wore off, made him drowsy, and he sat back with closed eyes wrapped in a half-conscious trance, lulled by the beating of the horses' feet and the scrape and rumble of the wheels on the hard road. For the moment he was emotionally worn out and incapable of much feeling, but he had a premonition that he was drawing steadily nearer to some emotional sensation which as yet did not touch him. He was content to await it; and the long miles through the green growing country seemed short to him in the deepening expectation of revisiting the place of his birth.

The gentle, monotonous rolling of the carriage bore him on as in a dream. It was in a dream that,

as the horses dropped to a walking pace on the outskirts of Newry, he sat up and took his passive part in the slow progress through the town, watching the eager interest of little barefoot children, and the respectful uncovering of people's heads. It was in a dream that he noticed the cessation of the rumbling wheel-lullaby when they stopped here and there at a roadside inn to water the horses and, presumably, to beer the Black Brigade; that he smelt the drifting odour of peat, heard low voices talking in the familiar accent, and submitted to the sympathetic attentions of Clod and Dickson. At Dundrum, where they changed the carriage-horses (the four horses drawing the hearse had a light burden), he got down to avoid the stolid and absorbed scrutiny of a squalid little crowd, and wandered through the once familiar streets. How small and mean they seemed to have grown! There was Mulligan's jobyard, where his father had always put up his horses; there was Quinn's public-house, the resort, in Protestant eyes, of disreputable Catholics, with the first "n" of the white raised letters still missing from the background of Reckitt's blue; and there — yes, there was "wee M'Guire," the bearded, hunchbacked, crippled dwarf, who had been the terror of his childhood, looking not much older, and raking, as of yore, with his crutch in the gutter.

As he returned to his carriage Mr. Clod, in whom a spirit of holiday travel was struggling hard with professional gloom, ventured a few words. "Beautiful morning we're having, Mr. Savage; and a

beautiful country! This is my first visit to Ireland; it's almost like an out — " He pulled himself up. " The departed lady herself, sir, couldn't have wished for more lovely weather. There seems to be a deal of poverty and misery in the country, sir."

" Why, this is some of the best land in Ireland," said Rupert; " there's no misery here. You should see the West."

" You don't tell me, sir! Dear me. But they're a very pleasant people, as I find them, sir — not so wild as one had been led to expect," said Mr. Clod, who had been handing out shillings (to be compendiously described on the bill as " disbursements ") to such of the loiterers as had put a hand to a bucket or tightened a strap; and who had consequently had Holy Mary and all the Saints invoked several times for his benefit.

. . . . . .

But now they were out on the last stage of the road, and Rupert with memory and association awakened, lost his sleepiness, and became aware of a growing sense of expectation. After all, that frail burden in the hearse was his own kin — she who had nursed and reared him, and nurtured the life that he had prized so proudly; the memories that sprang out upon him at every turn of the road were centred round her, and he realized that only a few more miles of their journey together remained, and that then he must bid her farewell for ever. At a rocky corner the road came out on the sea-shore — a well-remembered corner, for which as a child he used

eagerly to watch; and the crash of the surf and the smell of the seaweed completed the emotional effect. There are no more powerful vehicles of association than sound and odour; that which fades in more tangible and substantive things persists in them, embalmed as among spices; and the sounding, perfumed shore, thus come upon suddenly and without warning, and found unchanged by all the years that had so moulded and changed him, brought a sudden smart of tears to Rupert's eyes and sent a thrill to his soul.

The past, which he had thought dead, pressed living and persistent upon him at every mile-stone — Temple Granagh, where generations of his ancestors slept beneath the ruins of a Cistercian abbey; Donagh Farm, the scene of his father's operations in horse-breeding; Mill Bay, where they used to land from the yacht to fry the fresh-caught mackerel and picnic on the sward of Dennis Island; the scattered cottages and farmsteads, whose every inmate had once been familiar; and last, at the end of the long hill, the outer lodge-gate of Rathshene Demesne, the mossy wall of which bordered the road for the remaining five miles. At this place a halt was called. Hicks appeared with a clothes'-brush, and removed the white dust from Rupert's clothes, afterwards mounting on the box beside the driver, while Clod and his brigade drove on in front.

Just as they were starting again a carriage drove out of the lodge-gates, and fell in behind Rupert's; it was Lord Rathshene, infirm and old and almost

blind, who had come to receive his dead neighbour at his gates. And as they went on, now at a slower pace, one conveyance after another, found waiting at some cross-road or drawn up beside the hedge, silently fell into line. Farmers' gigs and carts, half-a-dozen jaunting cars, a ramshackle carriage or two, the Doctor's gig — a score of vehicles of every age and kind, containing villagers, farmers, servants, neighbours, friends, all dressed in their Sunday best, joined the lengthening procession. Rupert noticed that most of these mourners were poor, and almost all of them old; and to one face after another he found himself, to his surprise, able to put a long-forgotten name. At the door of the inner lodge-gate, whither she had struggled from her cripple's bed, stood old Ann, his former nurse, her wrinkled face streaming with tears; and from this point onwards into the town the train was joined by humbler mourners on foot — some of them barefoot. And so in silence, with solemn respectful escort, Jane Savage, who had left England followed by but one mourner — and a half-indifferent one — came home followed by many mourners and not one of them indifferent.

For as the hearse passed from the green tunnel of trees into the long, white, straggling street of Rathshene, Rupert became conscious of one cold wave of emotion after another sweeping through him. He sat upright and bareheaded in his carriage, his strong face firmly set, and his eyes fixed on the slow-moving hearse that jerked and hesitated over the

rough stones. The cottage doors were all closed and the windows veiled, although curious eyes peered out from behind them; the street was empty but for straying poultry. Even M'Clellan's porter-shop, against which his aunt had waged unrelenting war, was shut and shuttered; closed also, in defiance of licensing laws, was the Rathshene Arms. In the market square an orderly crowd was assembled — fishermen, Sunday scholars, Bands of Hope, and other small corporations important in Rathshene were waiting in silence, and silently took their places on either side of the hearse. At the corner of the square Rupert caught a glimpse of the harbour, with the fishing-fleet riding idly at their moorings; and in that momentary glimpse he had time to observe, almost unconsciously, that the old coasting schooner from Belfast, the *Mary Jane,* was in with a cargo of coal, and that the beacon on the Gull Rock had been repaired. . . . The dull tang of the church bell sounded on the silence.

The grating wheels stopped at the churchyard gate, where Clod and his men were waiting with Mr. Kennedy, the rector. Twenty years ago "Musther Kennedy" had been looked upon as a stranger, a new-comer; but here he was, elderly and grey, already a vestige of the past. Old Gregson and what remained of his human flotilla were there, their black dresses in odd contrast to their scarlet faces; the Hamiltons also, and other old friends and acquaintances. Rupert sat in his place amid a silence broken only by the pawing of horses, unfas-

tening of bolts, coughings, shufflings, low-toned orders. At last Clod came to the carriage-door, and Rupert stepped to his place behind the coffin. A vertical oblong of polished oak resting on the shoulders and between the stooped heads of two of his fellow-travellers, white flowers trailing over it on to one of the bald heads — he fixed his eyes on that, and, as the parson raised his voice to utter the tremendous "I," followed into the church.

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The faint, acrid smell of damp woodwork carried him back to the past again; he was a little boy, sitting in that same hard pew with his aunts, watching the nodding of a creeper outside one of the windows, and counting durance in church as an unmixed evil, and Sunday, when boats were prohibited, a lost day. There was the cornice of plaster running round the church on the level of the west-end gallery; how often he had occupied himself during sermon time in wondering whether it would be possible, by any feat of strength or agility, to clamber round the building on that cornice! There was a bad gap on each side of the chancel arch, which, he had always decided, offered an insuperable difficulty; now he noted that it would be quite easy, so poor and plain and small had the church become. Sometimes he was brought back to consciousness of the present by a sentence — *He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them;* or *I am a stranger with thee and a sojourner, as all my fathers were* — or by a movement in the packed ranks of the congregation,

or the sight of tears in the eyes of a girl sitting with his aunt's Sunday class; but for the most part he stood as in a dream, blown upon by winds from the past, the centre of converging currents of memory and association that brought him the eternal message of the beginning and end of the generations — "Thou turnest man to destruction: again Thou sayest, Come again, ye children of men."

The blue of Abraham's cloak, in the garish window of Abraham offering up Isaac that coloured the sunbeams to the glory of God and in memory of a former Savage — a blue that had entranced his childish taste and puzzled his mind as being like nothing else in the world, he now saw to be identical with the blue of Mr. Kennedy's hood, and marvelled that he had never noticed it before. An overpowering hunger for the past, and distaste of the present that he had thought so satisfying, took hold of him; everything that this humble concourse in the little Irish seaboard town meant seemed infinitely nobler and greater than the things he had cared about; it had been there all these years, his forefathers had chosen it, but he had neglected and rejected it. He felt that he could never be entitled to any tribute so simple and real as that paid to his aunt by this village community; and he felt it the more as it was paid not only to her, but to the family that had lived there in honour for so many generations, and was held, he felt sure, to have come to an end with her. Him they regarded as a stranger indeed, but

not as a sojourner, as his fathers had been; he had chosen to cast in his lot with others, and had no part in that inheritance.

He found himself, as the lesson with its eager leaping from assertion to deduction and from command to persuasion was read, listening to that strange, impassioned argument of the mortal and the immortal; of fighting with beasts at Ephesus so that men should believe in the resurrection of the body, and believe in it because the grain which they sow is not quickened except it die; and he remembered that a great sage of his own day had given as sufficient reason why that argument should not be read over him: "The grain of wheat does not die; or if it dies, it does not live again." He heard, with something of the artist's wonder, that flowing tapestry of words; but he heard it as music, and not as logic or literal truth. Glory of the sun and glory of the stars; things sown in weakness and raised in power; the transition from the first to the last Adam, and exquisite blossoming of the "quickening spirit"; the sounding of the trumpet and clothing of the corruptible in incorruption — the golden imagery passed in great rolling waves over his senses, but left his soul cold, disturbed, uncomforted.

They were singing now — a favourite hymn of his aunt's evidently; the hard treble voices of the girls who led the singing rang out in precise measure, carefully drilled for the occasion —

"O happy retribution:
Short toil, eternal rest;
For mortals and for sinners
A mansion with the blest.

"And martyrdom hath roses
Upon that heavenly ground:
And white and virgin lilies
For virgin souls abound."

Amid the sound and mobility of the hymn the rocklike stillness and dumbness of the coffin oppressed him heavily. He felt lonely, homesick; he longed acutely for one word from her, one sign that she recognized his presence there and understood his dumb, shapeless regrets; he would have given all he possessed to sweep away that load of flowers, tear away the covering of boards, and look once more with loving eyes on the dead face. But the slow, inexorable ritual of death and separation went on; other hands, the hymn being ended, took up the coffin; others stood nearer to her than he did, bore the light weight of her mortal body, and carried it again, with him but as humble follower, out to a corner of the churchyard where the nettles had been mown down to expose the sunk wall where gaped the entrance to the vault.

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There was more shuffling and marshalling, and crunching of the gravel walk under many feet; the parson took his place by the opening in the wall; the sexton in blue pilot-cloth, his tanned face elo-

quent more of the open sea than the mouldering earth, laid his peaked cap down and, stooping, disappeared into the vault. Clod, still showing a grief-stricken countenance amid a display of high technical efficiency, superintended the stripping of the coffin of its adornments; it was placed with its end in the narrow entrance; a low word of command, more heavings, thrustings, staggerings, agile passage of some of the black brigade before it unto the vault — it was out of sight; Clod and the remainder of his staff in single file stooping and disappearing also, like black poultry going into a roost. A moment, and they one by one appeared again, their brows glistening with sweat. Clod signed to Rupert, and for the moment there was an awkward pause. What was this? He realized with dismay that he was expected to go down and see the coffin in its place; he would have refused, but he felt helpless in Clod's hands, and, laying his hat on a gravestone, he also stooped and passed into the black sunless oblong. His senses of sight, touch, and smell were agonizingly suspicious; he peered and shrank and sniffed, but the vault, which had been opened early in the morning, only smelt earthy.

He saw the coffins piled against the sides, an absurd-looking little one among them, belonging to the sister whom he had never seen, and who had died in infancy before he was born. All the polish had gone from them, but otherwise time seemed to have dealt easily with them in that still place, and they preserved their dreadful secrets. The last vacant

place was filled by his aunt's; there would be room for no more; the tale of generations there was complete, and the dead, so scattered and various in their lives, were gathered together within the walls of this silent house. He glanced once more at his aunt's coffin, that new and shining example of the cabinet-maker's art, and at the words "Jane Savage" graven in the hard brass — the last mute cry of the individual to preserve its identity amid the slow return to universal, indestructible matter. At the same moment he became conscious of an alarm in his senses — a sudden perception, far finer than an odour, of the fact of corruption; every fibre of his being contracted in horror, and as he hurried out of the vault a qualm of nausea took him, so that for a moment he felt faint and giddy.

But the sweet sunlit air and the sight of the waiting crowd nerved him; he took his place with them, and the quavering, modulated tones of the parson began again. Rupert was acutely conscious; he heard every word, and yet noticed and afterwards remembered all sorts of trifles — a robin perching on a branch over Lord Rathshene's head, uttering two chirps, and hastily flying away; the masterly tactics of some little bare-foot children on the outskirts of the crowd who kept insinuating themselves into a more eligible position in spite of the frowns and fist-shakings of the schoolmaster; and, as Mr. Kennedy was saying: "Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not Thy merciful ears to our prayer," the stealthy passing of a handful of

earth from the sexton to Mr. Clod. Clod caught Rupert's eye for a second, but looked hastily away again, scratching his chin with the forefinger of his right hand, as though to show that there was nothing in it; but presently, at the words of committal, he stepped forward with the air of a mournful conjuror, and shot the contents of his hand, with three nicely calculated motions, into the vault, afterwards dusting his hands and retiring to the background as one who had played his part, not to the gallery, but in accordance with his own far higher standards.

"Lord, have mercy upon us," said Mr. Kennedy.

"Christ, have mercy upon us," said Warnock the sexton and Miss Quayle, the leader of the choir, accompanied by a mutter from the crowd, taken thus by surprise and hopeless of being in time; and confirmed in loud tones by Mr. Gregson.

"Lord, have mercy upon us," corrected Mr. Kennedy, as one entitled to the last word; and the monotone flowed on again, while the leaves shimmered in the breeze, and the girls of Miss Savage's Sunday class furtively blew their noses. The undertaker's men had melted away into the background; round him now Rupert could see only Rathshene faces, old and lined, most of them, and eloquent of the solemnity of the moment. . . .

"Who also hath taught us (by His holy apostle Saint Paul) not to be sorry, as men without hope, for them that sleep in Him. . . ."

A beggar in filthy rags sneezed loudly twice, and, as eyes were turned reproachfully upon him and his

tatters, looked ready to sink into the earth for shame, and gave a sickly smile of embarrassment. Rupert felt the tension suddenly relieved; he could have smiled too, and felt grateful to the beggar; there was a stir in the crowd; the spell was broken; they began to think of dinner; and while Mr. Kennedy was saying "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world," women left at home in the cottages were lifting the lids of potato saucepans and saying: "Sure, they'll not be long now."

And so presently, when all was over and the last Amen said and the Book closed, they did go back to dinner and to life, some of the older ones lingering to shake hands with Rupert, and speak a few homely words of sympathy and praise of the dead.

"A wonderful woman, your aunt," said old Lord Rathshene; "we shall miss her here. Won't you come back to lunch? No? Going back to-morrow? Well, you're a busy man, and the world moves fast now. When you come back you must come and dine and have a talk." And he hobbled off to his carriage.

"Ah, Masther Rupert, an' ye don't know me," said one tearful old woman at the gate; "but many's the time I've nursed yer honour, and Miss Jane before ye, an' the dear knows when there'll be the like of her again. May God bless yer honour, and all yer honour's — " The quavering old voice died off into tearful silence as Rupert pressed her hand and spoke some kind words.

He walked back through the village with Mr. Kennedy, speaking to this one and that, to the silent house overlooking the rocky shore, where only the servants, tearful and expectant, awaited him with luncheon in the familiar dining-room.

How strange it all was; the rooms seemed a little smaller and shabbier than of yore, but how dear and familiar, how melancholy! As he walked out of one silent room into another he held his breath and listened, as though he expected to hear the dead voices still speaking there, or meet his own dead self passing from doorway to doorway. It was harder to bear even than the scene in the churchyard. He felt that the real parting and burial were here; that these were the obsequies of all that had made life dear to him; for where memories and associations spring to life we bury our hearts anew, and wherever Rupert buried his heart, he buried Celia with it.

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The lawyer lunched with him, and Rupert talked business while they lunched, glad to escape into definite practical things out of the terrifying maze of memories. The afternoon was spent in going over books and documents. There was a question, now, when his income seemed likely to be reduced for a time, whether he would be able to keep on the little property. But it appeared that his aunt's death brought an addition to his income that would be enough to keep Rathshene going in its old quiet way; and although he could no more have lived

there at present than he could have lived in St. James's Place, he felt that some day he might be glad to come back, and to feel that there was a home there even though it were so lonely and silent.

At five o'clock Clod came for him, and together they went back to the churchyard. The vault was already bricked up, and looked as though it had never been disturbed; and Clod, about to depart again into a world where things were done a little more regularly, looked upon his labours and saw that they were good.

"Everything passed off very nicely, I think, sir," he said. "Quite a large gathering at the grave. I think the service was very nice — everything very nice, and the people seemed to be genuinely affected." Clod had been distributing money to various helpers and to beggars; making only one mistake, when he met in the High Street General the Hon. Peter Slade, Lord Rathshene's brother (a veteran of the Crimea, who had a wooden leg and dressed very oddly), and gave him a shilling, much to his surprise.

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Rupert spent the evening alone. He had told the Hamiltons and some others who had been anxious to show him kindness that he wished to be alone, as he was going away the next day and had much to do. He rowed himself out a little way in one of the boats, which Sam, grown a little greyer and stouter, had kept painted and ready year after year; and as he smelt the brown, wet seaweed, and felt the pull

of the tide, and listened to it echoing from the rocky shore and filling the quiet evening air with voices, it seemed to him as though he had never been away, and that he should hear other familiar voices calling to him as he crossed the lawn and shrubbery. But he found only silence, aching and intolerable, and he went to bed early.

The next morning was occupied with the agent in a tour of the place, in which the outward and simple details of life were so insistent that it was impossible to think about anything but them; and Rupert almost forgot that he had ever been an artist, and talked crops and soils and drainage with the old zest.

But it was all over by lunch-time. He was going away in the evening. The necessity for constant movement was upon him; having settled his business, he felt it was impossible to stay in Rathshene another hour. He hardly knew whither he intended to go — Paris perhaps, and then to Spain. He felt a great longing to go back to Spain and see if that road on which his youthful feet had stumbled had been really the right road after all.

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The afternoon was warm and still; the house and grounds were silent but for the sound of the tide running past the rocks. Rupert sat at the library table where he had been writing a letter, his chin propped on his elbows, his eyes looking straight out in front of him. The long windows giving on to the lawn on the westward side of the house were wide

open, and his view was of a strip of the blue, sliding waters of the lough, the green hills of the distant shore, and a strip of sky over all.

But he was not looking at the hills or the sea or the sky; his eyes were focussed hundreds of miles away. He tried to face squarely the thoughts that he had been shirking and to think out his position. He had been brought by hard work, good fortune, and a wave of something like a fashion in the particular work that he did, to a great height of fame and popularity. He had so wrought upon the spirit of his time that he had made knowledge of his work and interest in it one of the hall-marks of artistic intelligence and cultivation. He had gathered into himself and expressed in his work so much of his own day and hour, that to know it thoroughly was to know what was newest and most vital in the confused movements of the modern spirit in art.

Now, owing to the moral obliquity of Cyril Midwood — a thing of which Rupert had been aware, but which he had chosen to ignore — he had been involved in the ruin of the other man; and Midwood, in falling himself, had laid hold of the pillars of their common house and brought the whole thing down with a crash. Rupert's own work was good and sound — he knew it; but he knew also that he had not been content to build his reputation on the strength of his work alone, but on personality, on fashion, on the exaggerated importance attributed even to the trifling doings of a clique. Otherwise this catastrophe would not have had the power to

involve him in it. If he had stood on his work alone he would have stood clear of the falling edifice; but he was in it and part of it; and though he was innocent of the miserable obscure perversions that had compassed the ruin of Midwood, he was not so certain that he was innocent of a share in producing an artistic environment in which they could be cultivated. It was a hateful thought, but he faced it squarely.

So much for his work. There was nothing really to dismay him there, although he had many things to get rid of and forget. But when he considered himself and his own individual life, the chill crept over his heart again and the furrows came in his brow. He was sorriest for his friends, and a little contemptuous of his timid acquaintances; one of the only brave things that had cheered him had been a warm-hearted but sadly-worded invitation from Lady Fastnet to come and stay with her at Castle Fastnet, if he wanted a friendly retreat.

He looked out across the rippled talking waters to the green fields beyond, and followed with his eye the wooded coast-line northwards to where it became merged in the deep blue background of the hills; and his thoughts were of his boyhood and youth, and of the life that had flowed like a river so quietly here until it had merged into the open sea of the world of labour and love.

But when they came to Celia his thoughts stopped like shying horses. He could not think. He led his mind up gently, but his thoughts were in a

region of terror and saw nothing as it really was. It was a kind of panic fear that possessed him. Fear of what, he hardly knew; fear of life without her. . . . He tried to think again, to remember. He turned the ring that she had given him slowly on his finger and uncovered the little word "forse" that had meant so much. "Perhaps" — perhaps what? He remembered the last time that he had seen her, he remembered the look in her eyes, of perfect truth, of unending love that could be trusted through everything and for ever; it had been his greatest prize. What had happened? His hour of need had come, he had called to her and she had not answered; worse than that she had employed her husband to answer for her. . . . It meant nothing; it was not true, it was impossible — and yet the facts were there between them; she was far away, and he was here alone.

It was one of those rare moments in which the imagination is suddenly clarified and realizes a position completely and clearly. Rupert had a sense of complete and utter loneliness and emptiness; and he put his head down on his arms — not to sob, for he could not cry at his own miseries, but for the mere sensation of hiding his head somewhere, and covering his sight from the light of a day that had become intolerable.

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There came a faint rustle at the open window — the sea breeze often brushed through the ivy with a sound like the stir of silken garments. He did not

move. The sound came again, and with it another sound, like the catching of a breath. Rupert raised his head heavily and slowly, and then something between a gasp and a sob rose in his throat.

For, standing framed in the window, stood Celia, her hands clasped before her, her dark dress outlined against the background of moving water, her face, shaded and veiled beneath the drooping brim of her hat, grave and weary — but oh, how ineffably sweet! Rupert gazed for a second, his eyes widely opened, his lips parted. He held his breath, as though she were a vision that would vanish at his sound or movement.

The long eyelashes swept slowly upwards, the sweet mouth parted; amid the weariness, the solemnity of her expression, a little smile lurked about the lips.

"Good afternoon, Rupert. I'm afraid I have brought a lot of luggage. I — I've come — to stay." The dear voice broke, the eyes filled with tears, the hands were unclasped and held out; but before her head drooped she was caught in his arms, clasped and held motionless there, like molten gold that, after the bruisings and washings, after the firing and melting and purifying in the refiner's furnace, runs into the mould to fill it and take its shape for ever.

"Celia, my darling, my love, my own!" He covered her eyes and her mouth and her hair with blind kisses, and listened for the whisper that came like a sigh of rest and contentment — "Rupert, darling Rupert!"

"My beloved, my own now, my very own now!"

"Your very own always!" . . . .

Who can speak or write of those rocket-flights of the soul when at the touch of love it soars beyond time and space, and breaks into its starry blossom of fire? The stick falls back to earth, the material elements of fire are released and go back to their appointed place in the universe, but the fire and the colour and the glory do not return; they die there where they were born, in empyrean heights beyond our sight and ken; and, living and dying, they reveal all heaven and earth for one moment as glory and colour and fire. In the meeting of man and woman, soul with soul and body with body, there is all poetry and art, all religion, all empire and civilization, all earth and heaven, all the universe, all time and death and eternity.

. . . . . .

"How could you have doubted that I would come when you needed me? How could you think that when everything else failed you I could fail? Oh, Rupert, I shall have to begin and teach you all over again!"

"Teach me that you are here, that I am with you, that you are mine! Dear, let me learn that first." They were sitting quietly now, hand in hand in the library, and Celia was telling him of her life since that dreadful day — her growing agony and determination, her utter loneliness, her final resolution when she heard of his aunt's death from Lady Waynefleete, and understood from her the extent of the injury like to be done to Rupert. And then

she had told Lady Waynefleete everything, more than she even told Rupert, or that he ever would seek to know. And Lady Waynefleete had picked up a railway guide, and given it to her, and said, "I will stand by you both, and, if I am alive, welcome you back to England." And she had taken Celia in her arms, and for the first time in twenty years, cried in the presence of another woman.

Celia said very little about Graeme. Rupert knew what the infliction upon him of the inevitable conventional stain would mean to her, but she had done it calmly and deliberately, and kept hidden the conflicts of her soul. All she said was —

"I told him myself — I didn't write it. He broke a compact we made years ago, or tried to break it. I think he hates me — I hope so, for his sake. It will carry him through the worst, and afterwards he will really be happier without me. It was never anything but a failure, although I think we both tried to make the best of it. And oh, Rupert, it is *behind* me now! Let us never look back. We would have to look back separately, but we can look forward together!"

The shadows began to lengthen on the blue hills, reminding Rupert of the arrangements he had made to go away that night. "I must do something," he said; "I must make some arrangements for you, Celia."

She laid her hand on his. "We will both go," she cried; "this is your home; it is sacred to things quite different from the sacredness of our love. We

mustn't mix them, or offend the spirits of those dear dead people."

"Darling, our happiness can offend no one; we shall fill the world with it. It has changed everything for me. I thought I minded the row about me, but I see that I don't. I can smile at it, and so can you. And I feel that you and I together can be in tune even with all the memories that are here."

"No, dearest, we will go — and to-night. All my luggage is there at the lodge — I didn't even bring it in! Listen to me.

"I want us to come to this place differently, in a different mood, in a different hour, not like this, when you and I are all torn and bruised, and the shadow of death is over us. We could not be healed here — we must go away to another world, another life for that. I want to learn every bit of it, every rock and stone that is dear to you. But there must be a break — for you far more than for me. Some day this will be our home — but only when you can bring me to it in a way that wouldn't hurt *them* — Rupert, dearest, when I am your wife." . . .

In his heart he felt as she did; and so the old temple of family life suffered no indignity from them or their love, but went back to its green, dreaming sleep, lulled by the drowsy tides, until one more cycle of its life should begin, until it should wake again to the sound of little voices and pattering footsteps, until once more the voice of the generations should speak in it — "come again, ye children of men."

XV

Lady Fastnet was walking before breakfast in the garden of her gloomy house in the west of Ireland. It had rained all night, and would begin to rain again presently; the air, although it was summer, was lifeless and heavy with moist heat. The long stucco façade of the house had weathered and peeled off in places and had been indifferently repaired; it was in the worst and most pretentious style of sham architecture of the eighteenth century, and under the gloomy grey sky, and in the light which the deep green foliage of the rank trees absorbed, it looked like a prison. The trees had grown too thickly about it, and had hidden the stony fields and bog that would otherwise have filled the distance; there was hardly any colour of flowers or shrubs in the garden; all vegetation seemed to have conspired to express itself in the deep and sombre tone of the rankly growing evergreens.

The cypress walk, where her ladyship was taking her morning stroll, was a mere tunnel of heavy, sad-looking trees; the view of the house was obscured from it, which is perhaps the reason why Geraldine chose to walk there. It was very silent, and her light

footfall was almost muffled by the moss that grew in the gravel. Her slight and still girlish figure in its blue linen dress seemed a very alien and incongruous inhabitant of this melancholy scene. She had a letter in her hand, which she was reading as she walked slowly up and down.

"FUENTERRABIA, *15th May.*

"MY DEAR LADY FASTNET, — You would understand from my telegram that I was leaving England, and so have had one explanation why I could not accept your kind, beautiful invitation. There is another reason which I think I ought to give to you, although perhaps you will find it difficult to bring yourself to sympathize with me in it.

"In the darkest moment of my life the woman whom I love, and who loves me, came and joined her life with mine, and has given up everything that a woman can give up in order that our lives may be shared. This would of itself mean that we should have to leave England; but in any case, after all that has happened, it would be impossible for me to work there for a time. When the pillars of our temple were pulled down there, good and bad were crushed and buried together. Some day when the ruins are cleared I know that the good will be found to have endured and the bad to have perished; in the meantime there is nothing but dust and desolation and destruction, and one can only leave it to time and silence.

"You must not be anxious or unhappy about me.

I am not ruined, or hurt, or even damaged by all this; all that I have really made for myself in reputation remains; it is only what I had borrowed from others that has gone. But I cannot bear to think how nearly my work, my fame, if you like, came to be utterly crushed by the fall of this one man; I want to rest them on a better and broader basis, on foundations that moral earthquakes and accidents of time and place cannot shake. So it is to Spain, where the glory of art first came to me, that we are going back together — I and my chosen friend. I shall rediscover that glory with her, and renew it and deepen it, if I can, into a more durable glory.

"Do you remember how once, long ago, I told you that everything I was, or would be, I owed to you? Just now, when what looks like disaster has come upon me, and I am just as full of happiness as it is possible for any one to be, I like to acknowledge again how much truth there was in that boyish speech. The start in life means so much — the first impulse and its direction; and it matters so much who gives it to us! You gave me mine, dear Geraldine, you sent me to work instead of to love, and in doing that you taught me how to love.

"All this is very egotistical and rather incoherent. I wish you could be as happy as I am and then you would understand why. But I know that in your own way you will always be happy, because you are in possession of your own soul; you do the things you believe to be worth doing, and leave undone the things you do not really believe in. If only we all

did that! — I think I can see you, sitting somewhere in the sunshine in your garden, with the soft, green world of Ireland rolling away in far distances to the bright sky — your own room, your own things about you, and the peace and quietness that your soul loves. There now, you are laughing at me — even the mouth is smiling! And Celia sends you her love, although you don't know her. We both say thank you a thousand times, and ask for your blessing on our sinful happiness. Ever,

"RUPERT."

She turned at the far end of the cypress walk and looked down its dark green vista. The sky was a muffled grey pall, so charged with moisture that the very air seemed like water held in suspension. Heavy drops hung from every point of every leaf and flower and stem, but there was no light for them to reflect, and they looked like drops of lead. In Geraldine's eyes, that were always the colour of the sky, the leaden tears gathered and would not fall.

A murmur arose in the depths of the gloomy house and increased gradually with the barbarous crescendo of a beaten gong, until the strident boom reached its climax and hung there, echoing through the gardens, disturbing the rooks in the dripping treetops, and creeping out over field and coppice as though it were summoning a clan to arms. But no one answered; the sound diminished and died out on the heavy air; the rooks settled down again, and

but for the drip from the trees there was silence unbroken.

Geraldine, with her letter in her hand, passed slowly along the cypress walk, hesitated for a moment before the flight of stone steps, and passed on into the dark house.

THE END.

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